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John Osborne and the Ironic Comedy of Failure: A Study of Comic Subject and Techniques

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JOHN OSBORNE AND THE IRONIC COMEDY OF FAILURE
A STUDY OF COMIC SUBJECT AND
TECHNIQUES

by

Sandra Marie Lee

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
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PREFACE

John Osborne states in one of his many public proclamations that he is dissatisfied with the critical evaluation of his plays-- not because the criticism is negative but because it is distorted:

"I've always looked on myself as a comic writer, but people never seem to see any jokes in my plays. They only see the bad jokes which stick out a mile, but I put those in deliberately. They never see the ironies and comic elements."

This study of Osborne's plays will heed his suggestion and apply the concept of ironic comedy to his thirteen stage productions. Using the concept of ironic comedy will correct the critical distortion of the plays because the concept implies a focus upon three important dramatic elements instead of the one that most of the Osborne critics employ. To adequately develop the concept of ironic comedy in any play it is necessary to consider the dramatic subject, form and audience reaction. Much of the criticism of Osborne's plays focuses on one or the other but never all three of the elements. With the emphasis on the subject matter critics term Osborne an autobiographical protester, a societal critic, or an intellectual whose ideas function without the necessity of the stage. To critics focusing on technique or the formal, structural elements of his plays, Osborne is everything from an innovator, to a theatrical opportunist, or a dramatic experimenter seeking the perfect form (presumably once he finds this ideal all of his plays will be cast from that mold). Any critical attention of his treatment of the audience usually elicits images of the

angry young preacher on his pulpit--speaking directly and immediately with vitriol and bombast to the English society. But until all three of these essential dramatic elements are united in criticizing the plays, it will be impossible to assess his artistry accurately and completely.

The concept of ironic comedy is constant in Osborne's plays and stagecraft, but it is not delimiting. Comedy presents the actuality of the society as the antagonist of any errant individual behaviour. The society usually triumphs in the comedy. This is the general plot of all Osborne's plays. There is always a comic antagonist (with the exception of the last stage play, A Sense of Detachment) who seeks to elevate himself above the society because he imagines, validly or invalidly, that the society wars with his personal image of transcendence. This hero always comes to recognize that his humanity immerses him in the comic community that he abhors. In Osborne's plays this recognition does not lead to emotional acceptance by the hero. His private image changes; the public image usually remains unchanged. He realizes his failure to transcend ordinary human limits; he persists in his elevated stance.

Within the framework of ironic comedy there are several variables possible for the ironic comic dramatist. These variations revolve around the three necessary components of the dramas: the individuality of the hero, the comic society, and the issues of the contest. The one essential characteristic of all the societies in Osborne's plays is that the heroes evaluate them as inimical to their

elevation. Each hero's value system of transcendence is different. All Osborne heroes war against their own visions of the society in which they live. In some of the earlier plays the heroes wage battle against comic non-transcendent societies that do not really exist. The heroes of these plays distort and exaggerate the negative qualities in the societies to effect elevation. Despite their distortions there is often an essential accuracy of the heroes' world view that allows the audience to recognize the validity of the heroes' negative criticism. Consequently, even if Osborne only presented the same English society as his comic context, the comic contest would not be the same. However, Osborne's plays do not present the same comic context. As the society changes or moves the comic writer mirrors this rhythm. The English society changes in the twenty years that Osborne writes; his comic societies also change. Osborne also sets many of his plays in past non-English societies.

Within the flexibility that ironic comedy allows there is the tremendous obligation to control the comic presentation for the stage. Osborne's artistry in effecting this control is the focus of this study: through his conscious manipulation of the audience and his choice of staging and structural devices he is able to present the unlimited comic rhythm; the presentation is controlled and functions without the image of mere CHANCE that comedy implies.

VITA

The author, Sandra Marie Lee, is the daughter of Colonel George Walter Lee Jr. and Lucille (Smith) Lee. She was born January 16, 1945, in Tucson, Arizona.

Her elementary education was obtained in parochial schools in Burlington, New Jersey and Chicago, Illinois. She attended St. Thomas the Apostle High School in Chicago, Illinois where she was graduated in 1963.

In September, 1963, she entered Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and in June, 1967, received the degree of Bachelor of Science with a major in Biology and minor in Chemistry. At Aquinas College she was elected to Lambda Iota Tau, International Literature Honor Society, in October, 1965; Beta Beta Beta, Biological Honor Society, in December, 1966; and Kappa Gamma Pi, the National Scholastic and Activity Honor Society of Catholic Women's Colleges, in May, 1967.

After one year as an immunochemist at the American Medical Association, Biomedical Institute, she received a teaching assistantship in English at Loyola University of Chicago in September, 1968. In June, 1970, she was awarded the Masters of Arts degree in English. She was admitted to the doctoral program at Loyola University at that time. From September, 1971, to the present she has taught in the English Department of Indiana University Northwest. She has also been a lecturer at Loyola University since September 1972.

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CHAPTER I

JOHN OSBORNE, THE COMIC ARTIST

"Angry" is a critical commonplace for both John Osborne, the successful and prolific English playwright, and his dramatic works, thirteen stage productions from 1956 to 1973. The majority of his critics cannot or will not extricate the public image of the artist from his art. Consequently, Osborne's vituperative public role often effects facile critical examination of his plays. This process of entanglement and equation began on May 8, 1956 with the first performance of Look Back in Anger. The essentially favorable theatre reviews (running the gamut from "'the kind of play which, for all its imperfections, the English Stage Company ought to be doing'"¹ to "the best young play of its decade."²) were complemented by interviews of the dramatist. The profiles of the artist and the critical success of the production were intertwined because the one unanimously acclaimed facet of the play was its "authentic new tone of the Nineteen-Fifties, desperate, savage, resentful"³ representing the "classless" postwar youth. John Osborne, at twenty-seven, seemed to be as repre-

¹T. C. Worsley, "Introduction," in John Osborne, Look Back in Anger. A Casebook, ed. by John Russell Taylor (Nashville: Aurora Publishers Incorporated, 1970), p. 17.

²Kenneth Tynan, "Reviews of the First Performance, 8 May 1956," in John Osborne. Look Back in Anger. A Casebook, ed. by John Russell Taylor (Nashville: Aurora Publishers Incorporated, 1970), p. 51.

³T. C. Worsley, "Reviews of the First Performance, p. 51.

sentative of this generation as Jimmy Porter, the angry young man of the play. Osborne's background is working class, his education interrupted by striking back when struck by a school master, his careers ranging from trade journalist to actor to playwright, his politics "socialist." His personal socialism, however, is no program but "an experimental idea, not a dogma; an attitude to truth and liberty, the way people should live and treat each other."⁴ This socialism is reflected in his early public statements 1956-61 lambasting topical political events such as the Christmas Island explosion,⁵ the Suez Crisis,⁶ the Oder-Neisse Line,⁷ and political persons such as the "Tories, with all their old genius for self-deception and arrogance,"⁸ and the "Amazing Windsors," "the gold filling in a mouthful of decay."⁹ He divides the English society into two segments: the working people who are "materially better off than at any time in history" with twelve to fifteen pounds a week and "free" medical treatment and school meals, "paid for principally by the working classes themselves in taxes" and the "poor overtaxed betters" who are "really angry [because] they see themselves being eaten alive by [these] ignorant creatures, with [their]

⁴ John Osborne, "They Call It Cricket," in Declaration, ed. by Tom Maschler (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1958), p. 65.

⁵ Ibid., p. 47.

⁶ Ibid., p. 49.

⁷ John Osborne, "A Letter to My Fellow Countrymen (1961)," in John Osborne. Look Back in Anger. A Casebook, ed. by John Russell Taylor (Nashville: Aurora Publishers Incorporated, 1970), p. 68.

⁸ Osborne, "They Call It Cricket," p. 48.

⁹ Ibid., p. 58.

telly and pools, swallowing up all culture, all good manners, all decent behaviour." Yet Osborne pictures the working class man as a

monster [who] has been allotted a very comfortable, reasonably clean ashcan. He is still sitting on the pile of rotting culture, the half-chewed bones of symbols and debased values that should have been washed away long ago.¹⁰

Because the anger of the main character in Look Back in Anger as well as those in the next two stage productions, The Entertainer (1957) and Epitaph for George Dillon (1958) apparently coincides with the private, publicly expressed anger of the artist, many drama critics believe that Osborne is using the theatre to vent his spleen. Ronald Hayman states that Osborne uses the stage as a "platform and the characters as a mouthpiece for a large mixture of points that he badly wants to make. Most of them are aimed against the Establishment." For Hayman, Osborne's public and private resentment are inseparable.¹¹ James Hinchey terms these first dramas "explosive social iconoclasm" with "concern for the working class man with no firm place in society." However, he further states that there is "little doubt that the anger of his characters and their articulate desperation was shared by Osborne himself."¹² Ironically, the facile equation of John Osborne equals Archie Rice, Jimmy Porter, and George

¹⁰ John Osborne, "The Writer in His Age," in John Osborne. Look Back in Anger. A Casebook, ed. by John Russell Taylor (Nashville: Aurora Publishers Incorporated, 1970), pp. 60-1.

¹¹ Ronald Hayman, John Osborne, World Dramatic Series (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1972), p. 8.

¹² James Francis Hinchey, "John Osborne as Social Critic and Dramatic Artist: The Theme of Isolation and Estrangement in His Works" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1972) p. 1.

Dillon does permit a more incisive evaluation of Osborne's work than found in the minority of critics that insist that Osborne follows in the tradition of Shaw and, more recently, Arnold Wesker.¹³ For this equation eliminates the label of social dramatist. No major Osborne critic, those who have written full-length studies of his plays, terms these first dramas "social." Even a critic whose emphasis is the socialism of the drama of the Fifties, Kenneth Allsop, does not focus on Osborne's concern with a program of social change but on the element of protest and emotionalism: "Leftism in its emotive, protoplasmic state, a quivering transparent blob of indignation, is seen most dramatically in Osborne."¹⁴ Instead, the critics with the autobiographical perspective of Osborne's work see the playwright self-indulgently posed on the public platform of his plays, in the guise of his main characters, protesting the elements of society that effect him as an individual, with no vision of change. Although Osborne's first three plays were originally touted as the reflections of a generation and his heroes representatives of that age, these critics see

¹³The most illustrious of these is Eugene Ionesco who ranks Osborne with Miller and Brecht as "'auteurs du boulevard--representative of a Left Wing conformism" in "the Playwright's Role," Observer, 29 June 1958, quoted in Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, Anchor Books (Garden City: Doubleday Company, Inc. 1969), p. 101. Also, John Mander in The Writer and Commitment (London: Secker & Warburg, 1961), p. 22, negatively criticizes Osborne because Jimmy Porter is not committed: his views are "too indiscriminate to be taken seriously in themselves." He further states that Osborne seems to be in agreement with Porter so that the entire play, Look Back in Anger, is "fundamentally non-committal, . . . the play simply does not add up to a significant statement about anything."

¹⁴Kenneth Allsop, The Angry Decade. A Survey of the Cultural Revolt of the Nineteen-fifties (London: Peter Owen Limited, 1958), p. 36.

Osborne focusing upon the individual in relation to the society and not the society itself.

When most of the latter heroes in Osborne's plays from 1959 to 1971 did not only lambaste "big" social issues but were also content to rail at the intellectuals, the press, the entertainment industry, and the pettiness of the societal group Osborne originally termed the "poor over-taxed betters," the commonplace of equating angry Osborne with his angry, now non-working class, hero again because serviceable. The flexibility of the equation was explained by the vicissitudes of the author's private life. As one critic simply states: "it was no longer possible for him to sustain the role of a brilliant outsider. . . He was part of the Establishment himself." Consequently, the targets of the heroes cannot be as precise: "What strikes you upon reading the plays chronologically is the gradual transformation of the enemy from clear cut target into something as intangible as Peer Gynt's Boyg."¹⁵ One critic even quips that the "Osborne line is almost classically British in its ascent: yesterday's rebel is tomorrow's Establishment."¹⁶

Osborne's private subjects revealed in his interviews and writings for the press do again correspond generally to the concerns of the heroes in his plays:

Schoolmen of the Left[give]Left Magazines their special odour of intellectual carbohic and sanctity: and . . . exploit education

¹⁵ Gabriel Gersh, "The Theatre of John Osborne," Modern Drama 10 (September 1967): 140.

¹⁶ Gordon Rogoff, "Richard's Himself Again: Journey to the Actors' Theatre," Tulane Drama Review 11 (Winter 1966): 31.

as a substitute for imagination.

In America. . . . the air is not charged with the resigned, listless envy that often makes breathing alone difficult in British Show Biz.¹⁷

[Epistle to the Philistines:]

You gown sellers, fashion setters, you ploy makers and play fakers;

You poets and Rolleiflex flickers;

You breathy column sisters and microphone prelates; you dancing rogues and morning coat vagabonds;

You hushers and high mushers, you guff vendors and you friendless ones also;

All you obsequious, envious ones; you tendentious leader men; all you exquisite things.

You shall be called henceforth the New Set, for many are sybarites but few are chosen; . . .¹⁸

Most of the people who are hired to write about the theatre are bored by it, . . . Intellectuals detest and despise it openly . . .¹⁹

"There's a virgin period when you aren't aware of [the Lord Chamberlain, the censor] but eventually you can't avoid thinking of him. . . . He sits on your shoulder, like a terrible nanny."²⁰

The prevalence of the critical commonplace equation is understandable and valuable to some extent. Osborne's private statements, one half of the equation, are often, at least partly, efforts to publicize the plays: "'It's very easy to be rather upstage about it [over

¹⁷John Osborne, "Schoolmen of the Left," Sunday Times, 30 October 1960, p. 17.

¹⁸John Osborne, "The Epistle to the Philistines (1960)," in John Osborne. Look Back in Anger. A Casebook, ed. by John Russell Taylor (Nashville: Aurora Publishers Incorporated, 1970), p. 63.

¹⁹John Osborne, "On Critics and Criticism (1966)," in John Osborne. Look Back in Anger. A Casebook, ed. by John Russell Taylor (Nashville: Aurora Publishers Incorporated, 1970), p. 70.

²⁰John Osborne, quoted in Kenneth Tynan, Tynan Right and Left. Plays, Films, People, Places and Events (New York: Atheneum, 1967), p. 179.

publicity] and say, "It's not a writer's job to be involved in all that kind of vulgar publicity," but up to a point one has to exploit it, I think."²¹ He especially regards his verbal battles with the theatre critics of the "posh" papers after he receives unfavorable reviews as--again partly--"Theatrical enjoyment" and "'circus carry-on."²² He even concurs that there is "'undisclosed autobiography in everything one does."²³

The value of the equation, as afore mentioned, is in its focus on Osborne's concern with the individual, even if one believes the individual is Osborne himself. Early in his career Osborne described himself as an experimenter looking for truth; this is his definition of socialism. His role as dramatist is the questioner about the people. "Experiment means asking questions."

Nobody can be very interested in my contribution to a problem like the kind of houses people should have built for them, the kind of school they should send their children to, or the pensions they should be able to look forward to. But there are other questions to be asked--how do people live inside those houses? What is their relationship with one another, and with their children, with their neighbors and the people across the street, or on the floor above? What are the things that are important to them, that make them care, give them hope and anxiety? What kind of language do they use to one another? What is the meaning of the work they do? Where does the pain lie? What are their expectations? What moves them, brings them together, makes them speak out? Where is the weakness, the loneliness? Where are the things that are unreal-

²¹ John Osborne, "John Osborne, The Observer Profile," Observer, 17 May 1959.

²² John Osborne, interviewed in "Osborne and Tynan on Life," Vancouver Sun [from the Observer], 16 August 1968, p. 4.

²³ Ibid.

ized?²⁴

These questions indicate his essential concern with what he later terms "'interior things and people's inner self.'"²⁵ In a BBC interview, he stresses that the "person" is his main interest: "'personal relationships . . . these are the things that interest me most. . . . my concern principally is with the relationships between people, how people relate to each other and to themselves.'"²⁶

There are certainly critics of Osborne's entire canon who observe this focus on the individual without the autobiographical perspective. For an example, Simon Trussler, who has written two studies of Osborne's work, unequivocally states that the plays are not "successive installments in some spiritual apologia."²⁷ Thus, when he examines the plays his criticism is refreshingly devoid of the word "anger" and more concerned with the complexities of the heroes. Trussler does not see merely angry characters but characters who "burrow back obsessively into their own pasts, though they have been long set by habit and experience into the mould of a present from which they feel themselves estranged."²⁸ This description of Osborne's characters suggests more answers to the questions Osborne raises than

²⁴Osborne, "They Call It Cricket," p. 66.

²⁵Osborne, "Osborne and Tynan on Life," p. 4.

²⁶John Osborne, "John Osborne," in The Playwrights Speak, ed. by Walter Wager (New York: Delacorte Press, 1967), p. 95.

²⁷Simon Trussler, John Osborne (London: Longmans, Green & Co. LTD, 1969), p. 5.

²⁸Ibid., p. 27.

the single epithet--angry. Trussler's analysis illustrates what happens to the criticism of Osborne's work when removed from the onus of the autobiographical equation. For, finally, there is more limitation than value in this critical commonplace. The limitation to the subject matter has already been suggested. With the idea of anger from Osborne's first play constantly reinforced by Osborne's public statements of private concerns, there is a tendency to only examine the heroes as further extensions of the Osborne angry man. Of course, his heroes are often superficially angry; but the texture of their characterization is so much richer.

Perhaps the most serious limitation of the critical perspective is its effect upon the image of John Osborne as a dramatic artist or craftsman. Anger implies subjectivism, emotionalism and non-control: it does not provide the aura of detachment and artistry of a non-social dramatist. His image as the popular preacher using the stage as platform to air his personal grievances results in evaluations of his plays primarily in terms of the preacher and, only secondarily, the dramatic artist. To such critics Osborne's most valuable assets, are those of the preacher: rhetoric and emotional persuasion. Hayman states that "it is the strength of his own feelings that charge so many moments of naked emotion in his plays with the power they have to make an unforgettable impact--. . ."²⁹ Hinchey asserts that the "hallmark of John Osborne's dramaturgy has been a rhetorical barrage of protest which wounds and alienates his heroes and those whose lives

²⁹ Hayman, John Osborne, p. 139.

they touch."³⁰ The audience comes to Osborne's dramas "for the uninhibited emotional energy of his articulate protagonists, for that voice of protest and that picture of belligerency, . . ."³¹ John Russell Taylor allows that Osborne does have the "knack [emphasis mine], almost unique in his generation, of speaking directly in immediately comprehensible terms to a mass audience."³² Gersh defines Osborne's great theatrical contribution, the tirade, which "undermined dead conventions and brought the sound of living speech into the theatre," as a "theatrical amplification of his own voice; . . ."³³ Another unpublished doctoral dissertation concerned with Osborne's protest states that the scope will "preclude stagecraft" unless it has "strong thematic import"³⁴--as if that is so rare an occurrence! The essential problem created by viewing Osborne as the angry man in his plays is that with a preconceived notion of his intentions there is very little impetus to also evaluate the dramatic form since it seems only the platform of the preacher and subordinate to his anger.

When the critics of the autobiographical perspective do consider Osborne's dramaturgy it is most often in terms of realism or naturalism. This seems an obvious choice since the heroes are seemingly

³⁰ Hinchey, "John Osborne as Social Critic," p. 2.

³¹ Ibid., p. 171.

³² John Russell Taylor, "Ten Years of the English Stage Company," Tulane Drama Review 11 (Winter 1966): 124.

³³ Gersh, "The Theatre of John Osborne," p. 137.

³⁴ Dirk Ronald Budd, "The Vicissitudes of the Osborne Protest From 1956 to 1964" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1968), p. 16.

transferred from the author's reality; and even though the plays fail some of the tests of dramatic reality, he is excused because of his preacher image. Hayman believes that Osborne probably never will "commit himself fully to a discipline of writing in which he does his utmost to create full-blooded characters and then allow them to interact freely."³⁵ This prediction seems based upon the fact that Osborne's concern with his one-dimensionally angry heroes precludes the development of other characters in the plays existing on the same level.³⁶

The assumption of Osborne realism is not unique to the autobiographical critics. Because of the revolution in the English theatre that accompanied the production of Look Back in Anger, Osborne was placed at the head of the group of young writers whose plays exhibited changes in character selection and language and setting: The Angries. The general criticism of the group is specifically applied to its titular head. The angries emphasize content and characterization not style and stylization; the structure of the plays is "conveniently realistic." Consequently, explication of the plays is a "wasted effort" because their "forte is speaking out rather than artfully concealing; their frame of reference . . . the outer, rather than the invisible."³⁷ So, even important Osborne critics like Trussler and Carter, while

³⁵ Hayman, John Osborne, p. 142.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

³⁷ John Gassner, Directions in Modern Theatre and Drama. An Expanded Edition of Form and Idea in Modern Theatre (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965), p. 360.

analyzing the characterization in the plays in admirable depth, criticize Osborne because they find that he does not really conform to the realistic mould that they themselves have applied to him. Trussler views Osborne as an "ill-disciplined writer, in the sense that his absorption in words often blinds him to the technical requirements of his craft-- . . ."³⁸ One of these technical requirements is the description of the development of action. Carter believes that Osborne is incapable of this.³⁹ Carter comments similarly on the absence of integrated plot and developed minor characters, in the realistic tradition, but excuses Osborne these trespasses since his achievement is the emotion his plays generate. "Osborne's is a bright compulsive theatre."⁴⁰

Another group of critics decry this insistence on realism and Osborne's formal incompetence; they believe that the repeated failure to adhere to the realistic pattern in almost every play must be intentional. They state that the plays are expressionistic; things external to the hero appear as they are "imaginatively apprehended by his characters." With the emphasis on the heroes' consciousness both Katharine Worth and Pieter Jan Van Niel view Osborne's language as not merely angry rhetoric but evidence of a "higher poetic imagination,"⁴¹ reflecting the complexities of the heroes. Van Niel's recent unpublished dissertation is one of the most incisive studies of Osborne to date.

³⁸Trussler, John Osborne, p. 25.

³⁹Ibid., p. 27.

⁴⁰Alan Carter, John Osborne (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1969), p. 165.

⁴¹Katharine J. Worth, "The Angry Young Man (1963)," in John Osborne. Look Back in Anger. A Casebook, ed. by John Russell Taylor (Nashville: Aurora Publishers Incorporated, 1970), p. 103.

His essential focus is upon the heroes and their interaction in a world with "little phenomenal possibility."⁴² He divides Osborne's dramas into two traditions: the hero play, or study of "heroic consciousness" beginning with earlier plays of the protagonist as mouthpiece culminating in A Patriot for Me which integrates imagery and "phenomenal concept" with the protagonist's interior; and the many character experiments beginning as forms outside the characters' inner consciousness and culminating in the television plays, The Right Prospectus and Very Much Like a Whale.⁴³ Van Niel sees Osborne's dramas as tending toward a solution of the dilemma of man in a hostile world and "man in the grip of a life which leads toward death"; he believes that the dilemma is not answered until both sides are confronted and accepted in A Patriot for Me.⁴⁴ Van Niel also considers the relationship between subject and form: "each play finds its own unique method for exploring a slightly different form," The concepts of experiment and the fact that each play "feeds the next" to the production of the masterpieces are essential to his thesis.⁴⁵ Consequently, only the general forms of the plays are discussed (Brechtian, etc.) in relationship to the expressionism. Also, the thesis depends upon a development towards masterpieces which tends to subordinate the craft of the earlier plays. But, at least as expressionistic dramatist Osborne gains stature as both a

⁴²Pieter Jan Van Niel, "The Plays of John Osborne--The Experiments and the Results" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1972), p. 5.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 9-10.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 2.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 10.

complex thinker and craftsman of the dramatic form which is equally complex. However, the focus upon the inner being and imagistic language tends to avert attention from the specific aspects of form such as the setting, the stage images, and the audience reaction. It removes much of the plays from the stage. The relative unimportance of the stage milieu to Van Niel's thesis is implicit in his selection of the two television plays as masterpieces in the second tradition. Osborne distinguishes between the stage productions and the ones intended only for television: "'The marvelous thing about television plays is that you can use the kind of constrained ideas that aren't enough in themselves for a play in the theatre.'"⁴⁶ He also warns that "theatrical ideas are theatrically expressed and not in the literal-minded manner of literary weeklies. . . . They are organic and when they work they can be seen to be working."⁴⁷

Each group of critics fails to adequately evaluate Osborne's work because they imagine either a purely emotional playwright-preacher or an intellectual. Osborne is a curious mixture of both. The subjects and ideas in his plays are worthy of any "intellectual." Yet, as a dramatist, Osborne expresses these ideas through theatrical media of popular entertainment. Osborne explains the mixture: "'I don't think conceptually. If I see or hear an idea, I turn it into something concrete, . . . I'm not a thinker in the accepted sense . . . I don't think that is what the theatre is about.'"⁴⁸ He illustrates the prac-

⁴⁶ John Osborne, interviewed in A. Alvarez, "John Osborne and the Boys at the Ball," New York Times, 28 September 1969, sec. 2, p. 5.

⁴⁷ Osborne, "On Critics and Criticism," p. 71.

⁴⁸ Osborne, "Osborne and Tynan on Life," p. 4.

tical problem of the mixture in commenting upon the difference between American and English (who know his public image through the communication media) reception of his plays: "'People take me more seriously [in America] . . . [In England] they look more for the entertainment and the tilting at things'"⁴⁹

This apparent opposition of subject and stage form can be reconciled by the concept of ironic comedy. This phrase defines both Osborne's subject and method. Osborne suggests this concept of his work in an interview:

"I've always looked on myself as a comic writer, but people never seem to see any jokes in my plays. They only see the bad jokes which stick out a mile, but I put those in deliberately. They never see the ironies and comic elements. I'm always surprised when they find a play not comic but irritating or distasteful or boring [emphasis mine]." ⁵⁰

This study will illustrate the viability of that suggestion

Comedy celebrates life in all its renewal, generation, vitality, abundance, and flexibility. The comic plot presents a contest between a hero and any obstacles to the hero's desire. The comic victory of the hero emphasizes the triumph of arbitrary flexibility over consistency or an unincremental repetition and persistence. Because the ideals of comedy are not formulated or defined, the comic world is not presented with the sense of inevitability. Chance operates. The world is fixable and reversible.

The ending of the comedy usually finds the hero winning in a con-

⁴⁹ John Osborne, quoted in "Osborne Belies 'Angry Man' Tag. British Writer's Latest Play Hailed in Philadelphia," New York Times, 14 November 1965, sec. 1, p. 128.

⁵⁰ Osborne, "John Osborne and the Boys at the Ball," p. 5.

test with an antagonist who wills an absurd, irrational and inflexible law upon the society. The hero triumphs in his ability to go on and overcome this obstacle as he causes the antagonist and his eccentricities to conform to the comic rhythm of the world. Because the antagonist often joins the comic community there is "no permanent defeat and permanent human triumph. . . . In comedy, therefore, there is a general trivialization of the human battle. Its dangers are not real disasters, but embarrassment and loss of face." The comic antagonist also faces no real defeat because in his eccentricity he is a paradigm of the comic rhythm--he seeks to "maintain" his "own complex organic unity." The feeling produced by his contest with the hero is one of "heightened vitality, challenged wit and will, engaged in the great game with Chance."⁵¹ The comic antagonist fights the hero on a personal level but is really engaged in a contest with the world. For the hero of a comedy represents the vitality and the compromise of Chance. The contest itself presents the "continuous balance of sheer vitality that belongs to society [the hero] and is exemplified briefly in each individual [the antagonist]; . . ."⁵² The comic antagonist is part of the sheer vitality as he is simultaneously defeated by it.

Since the perpetual vitality belongs to the World and its representatives, the winner of the contest is not the individual antagonist. Those individuals who survive the comic defeat are not the ones who persist in their heightened sense of wit and will but those with the common

⁵¹ Susanne K. Langer, "The Great Dramatic Forms: The Comic Rhythm," Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art (Developed From Philosophy in a New Key) (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), pp. 348-9.

⁵² Ibid., p. 333.

sense to compromise and reconcile to life or the World. The tone of comedy is actually a pessimistic one for the individual. The comic community is cruel and indifferent to personal idiosyncrasies. As the comic antagonist is defeated the image is actually that the vitality of the world and the society of men is feeding upon the vitality of the individual. The comic society tends to mirror nature in its impersonal impetus toward birth, growth and the death of the non-vital--whether it be a spiritual or a physical death. The death of the spirit of the comic antagonist is characterized by Schweitzer in his definition of pessimism:

"Pessimism is depreciated will-to-live, and is found wherever man and society are no longer under the pressure of all those ideals of progress which need be thought out by a will-to-live that is consistent with itself, but have sunk to the level of letting actuality be, over wide stretches of life, nothing but actuality."⁵³

The cruelty of the way of the world is tempered by the nature of the comic antagonist's challenge and the values of the society. The comic dialectic between the World and the antagonist embraces many permutations. The pessimism of the antagonist decreases in direct proportion to the quality of the life of the society. The more positive the society, the less resistance the antagonist is able to reasonably muster. The less positive the values of the society are, the more pessimistic the comic immersion of the antagonist in the society.

The comic antagonist may be a ludicrous, "Humorous," in the sense that Ben Jonson used the term, character whose unincremental repetition forestalls any growth or birth in the society. He may be the old

⁵³Albert Schweitzer, The Philosophy of Civilization, trans. by C. T. Campion (New York, 1960), pp. 97-8, quoted in John von Szeliski, Tragedy and Fear: Why Modern Drama Fails (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1971), p. 6.

father-figure thwarting the path of true love; he may be the miser who appreciates the cold and metallic gold and not the warm and vital human being. The antagonist may be a plain dealer whose honesty and rigidity negate the pliant common sense necessary for man to exist together. He may be the one outspoken opponent of moral turpitude and decay that he envisions in the society--his censure negates the expansive, amoral nature of a society where the evil are not necessarily punished and where every one is so flawed that there are no villains.

The World that the antagonist battles in, the actuality, also has almost infinite range. It may range from a romantic "green" world where youth or summer always triumphs over winter, to a sensible but morally imperfect society, to a very evil society that negates the comic celebration of real human and vital values and affirms the celebration of a humourous embrace of material values. In the last society man allows himself to be part of an actuality that denies his humanity in a stringent, non-flexible search for material, non-vital goals. The essence of celebration that exudes from the comedy of the green world (in many of Shakespeare's romances)--the generation, renewal, and the abundance--is distilled into a world of gold.

"The first or most ironic phase of comedy is, naturally, the one in which a humourous society triumphs or remains undefeated." When a decadent world "simply disintegrates without anything taking its place," a "more intense irony is achieved."⁵⁴ The irony is effected by the defeat of the comic antagonist's vitality and the triumph of the mechanical emptiness. In some ironic comedies the comic antagonist is actu-

⁵⁴Northrup Frye, The Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 178.

ally killed as in The Beggar's Opera. The irony causes a reversal of the comic dialectic. The antagonist is actually more heroic than the hero. The challenged wit and will of the World's antagonist is more expressive of the essence of Chance than the society itself mirrors. The reversal is not complete, however. The new "hero" of the ironic comedy does not win--he is, after all, not the real image of the World. He only represents himself, not the society. If he is still alive after the contest, he is immersed in the actuality like all comic antagonists. His pessimism is greater than all the others.

Osborne's plays are set either in negative societies or in ones whose flexibilities and uncertainties cause such fragmentation that a stable society is impossible: contemporary England, Austria at the brink of World War I, Luther's world of the Protestant Revolt. The majority of the plays present the Osborne hero at odds with a contemporary England that in Osborne's view is not unlike Chekhov's Russia of 1900. The Empire has disintegrated and with it patriotism, imperialism, a classed society etc. However, Osborne's England has left nothing: and the positive "socialistic" values have not materialized. Each hero, of course, is concerned with a different aspect of the emptiness in his world. Osborne states that the vacuity of the world has caused "a great majority of the people" to consciously or unconsciously retreat from this world to the past. "They see--or believe they see--an end to all kinds of useful, often admirable, emotional securities which came from concept [sic] like national pride, and various pride by-products, like individual skills and craftsmanship."⁵⁵ These people accept the world.

⁵⁵ John Osborne, "A Word from John Osborne," Introduction to The Entertainer (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1958), p. 7.

The Osborne hero refuses to accept this defeated stance.

The comic contest between the Osborne hero and the empty world does not result in the hero's emotional acceptance of the societal norms. This comic contest ends in an impasse: the hero in the Osborne plays assumes a position of the preacher against the various aspects of the society and remains in the position even when it is obvious that no change will come. He accepts the world as a fact of life that he cannot alter; but, he does not conform or change in his position. This impasse is part of the ironic comic tradition:

"an absurd society may be condemned by, or at least contrasted with, a character . . . an outspoken advocate of a kind of moral norm. . . . When the tone deepens from the ironic to the bitter, the plain dealer may become a malcontent or railer, who may be morally superior to his society"56

Osborne's hero is contrasted to the society of those who merely accept; for Osborne "the climate of simple effort is bracing in itself."⁵⁷

The comic contest with the world as antagonist is only the most ostensive one in the plays. Osborne's focus on the individual effects a more serious ironic confrontation. For the individual in the plays who believes that his non-acceptance allows him to ascend to a position above his fellow humans also must face the contest between his idealized self-image of elevated vitality and the private personal reality of his failure to really transcend natural human limitation. The hero's idealized self-image introduces the tone of optimism most often found in tragic contexts.

"True optimism . . . consists in contemplating and willing the ideal

⁵⁶ Frye, The Anatomy of Criticism, p. 176.

⁵⁷ Osborne, "Schoolmen of the Left," p. 17.

in the light of a deep and self-consistent affirmation of life and the world. Because the spirit which is so directed proceeds with clear vision and impartial judgment in the valuing of all that is given, it wears to ordinary people the appearance of pessimism. . . it wishes to pull down the old temples in order to build them again more magnificently."⁵⁸

The course of the Osborne play illustrates that the hero's real image is not consistent with his ideal. Too often he is content to evaluate with no desire to rebuild; he also joins his fellow man by looking to the past which was decadent; he often proceeds with a partial judgment motivated by envy and pettiness. For example, Osborne's English heroes often extol the virtues of the idealized unattained socialist society, denounce the present society, and long for the security of the Kingdom in the previous "decadent" Edwardian era. The comic contest between the ideal and the real is exposed in the discrepancy between the human intention and the human deed. Cyrus Hoy believes that the "protagonists of tragedy and comedy alike are deficient in their knowledge of human limitation, of what they can hope and what it is the better part of wisdom not to attempt." Osborne's comic protagonist's lack of "self-knowledge" does lead to a "rude awakening in which he is made aware . . . of the truth about himself, and is left to live with it."⁵⁹

But, ironically, this contest also ends in impasse. Comic recognition implies both acceptance and forgiveness. The Osborne hero intellectually accepts the reality of his own nature and the world's. His mental acceptance relieves the "burden of comedy" that "man unde-

⁵⁸Schweitzer, The Philosophy of Civilization, p. 99.

⁵⁹Cyrus Hoy, "Comedy, Tragedy, and Tragicomedy," in Types of Drama, Plays and Essays, ed. by Sylvan Barnet et. al. (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1972), p. 637.

ceive himself about the limitations of humanity," and "see life for what it is."⁶⁰ Nevertheless, he does not emotionally forgive; he does not feel compassion for human failings, including his own, nor those of the world. He remains the malcontent who rails; this is his position of superiority. Both the world and the real self become inimical facts of existence. Osborne suggests that you "'should never forgive your enemies because they're probably the only thing you've got.'"⁶¹ This is exactly the final stance of the hero: an outsider with little real possession but the enmity he feels. He remains defiantly outside the comic world of forgiveness, emotional acceptance, and harmony.

Osborne always asserts that the ideas of his plays cannot be isolated from the form and that many of his plays exist on several levels.⁶² The concept of irony relates his form to his ideas. Osborne's original statement of dramatic intention is quite explicit in the ambivalence that his plays present. He stated then that--

I want to make people feel, to give them lessons in feeling. They can think afterwards. In some countries this could be a dangerous approach, but there seems little danger of people feeling too much --at least not in England as I am writing.⁶³

Although critical evaluations tend to over-emphasize (with disastrous results), Osborne's allegiance to the emotions, the statement does focus on emotions because the idea of a thinking English theatre was tra-

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 641.

⁶¹ Osborne, "Osborne and Tynan on Life," p. 4.

⁶² John Osborne, quoted in John E. Booth, "Rebel Playwright John Osborne Reflects on the Bitter Fruits of Success Here and Abroad," New York Times, 2 November 1958, sec. 2, p. 3.

⁶³ Osborne, "They Call It Cricket," p. 47.

ditional. Osborne believes that a merely thinking audience in England, "the most pampered, lazy collection of layabouts in the world," reacts to drama with a "very rigid set of stock responses" which the "'competent working dramatist'" manipulates or elicits by "imparting all the 'information' in all the shortest possible time" But for Osborne the direct rendering of information is not the nature of drama (contrary to the notions of most of his critics): "nothing 'leaves out' more than a play. It's [sic] form, its length, its nature demands it; . . ."⁶⁴ His definition of art as "organized evasion"⁶⁵ is an implicit aspect of ironic comedy--from the audience reaction, to the form, to the language and stage images.

Comic theorists usually maintain that comedy appeals solely to the mind.

The test of true comedy is that it shall awaken thoughtful laughter.⁶⁶

The comic demands something like a momentary anesthesia of the heart. Its appeal is to intelligence, pure and simple.⁶⁷

"This world is a comedy to those that think, a tragedy to those that feel."⁶⁸

⁶⁴Osborne, "A Word from John Osborne," pp. 7, 30.

⁶⁵Osborne, "They Call It Cricket," p. 51.

⁶⁶George Meredith, "An Essay on Comedy," An Essay on Comedy, George Meredith; Laughter, Henri Bergson, Doubleday Anchor Books (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1953), p. 47.

⁶⁷Henri Bergson, "Laughter," An Essay on Comedy, George Meredith; Laughter, Henri Bergson, Doubleday Anchor Books (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1953), pp. 63-4.

⁶⁸Horace Walpole, quoted in "Introduction," Types of Drama, Play and Essays, ed. by Sylvan Barnet et. al. (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1972), p. 11.

When the concept of irony is appended to that of comedy, the audience reaction is more complex. Northrup Frye states that the essence of ironic drama is ambivalence and uncertainty--the audience is "not sure what the author's attitude is or what his own is supposed to be, . .

"⁶⁹ In Osborne's plays the emotional response is achieved by the audience's sympathy for the hero's "optimistic" stance against the comic society. Yet the audience reaction is also, often simultaneously, the comic one of intellectual detachment not only because the society triumphs but also because the "tragic" stance of the hero is proven illusory. The audience in these ironic comedies remains "aloof although implicated."⁷⁰ The ambivalence of the audience mirrors the ambivalence of the hero in the same world (with a few exceptions). The audience must both feel and think because their society can no longer elicit those former stock responses of comedy. Osborne explains that his audience lives in a society of "such lurching flexibility that it is no longer possible to construct a dramatic method based on a shared social or ethical system."

The inexorable process of fragmentation is inimical to all public assumptions or indeed ultimately to anything shared at all. A theatre audience is no longer linked by anything but the climate of disassociation in which it tries to live out its baffled lives.⁷¹

The ironic comic contests and the elicited audience response exist in the framework or form of the plays. Osborne's plays range in

⁶⁹Frye, The Anatomy of Criticism, p. 176.

⁷⁰J. L. Styan, The Dark Comedy. The Development of Modern Comic Tragedy, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: University Press, 1968), p. 257.

⁷¹John Osborne, "John Osborne on the thesis business and the seekers after the bare approximate; on the rights of the audience and the wink and the promise of the well-made play," Times Saturday Review, 14 October 1967, p. 20.

form from the naturalistic play with well-made play overtones, the Brechtian cabaret and epic theatres, the expressionistic play, the absurd, to the theatres of improvisation and cruelty. Many of his critics view this formal variation as simple experiments of an author in search of an ideal form or as an example of the theatrical opportunist seeking profit through giving the public what is popular. The forms of all the plays are very intricately connected with the subject, the comic contest, and the audience response. Each form presents a world vision which identifies exactly the other combatant in the comic contests of the plays. Each form also elicits, often because of its theatrical novelty and popularity, a stock response which is altered by the ironic treatment. Also, despite variations of form, all Osborne's plays use the picture-frame stage permitting absolute control of the audience reaction: "I like to establish a kind of remoteness between the actors and the audience, which I only like to break at certain times, and I can do that in the picture-frame stage."⁷²

Finally, within the forms, Osborne uses both the images on the stage (he says these are usually the beginnings of his ideas of the plays⁷³) as well as the dialogue to present the comic contests. The stage images are functions of the form. The dialogue presents the inner contests of the heroes' battles with themselves.

⁷²John Osborne, "That Awful Museum," John Osborne. Look Back in Anger. A Casebook, ed. John Russell Taylor (Nashville: Aurora Publishers Incorporated, 1970), p. 65.

⁷³Osborne, "John Osborne and the Boys at the Ball," p. 5.

CHAPTER II

CONTESTS OF WILL AND DESTINY IN THE NATURALISTIC

WORLD--EPITAPH FOR GEORGE DILLON

AND LOOK BACK IN ANGER

The naturalistic world is ultimately comic. The essence of naturalism is the absolute control of the individual by the world of nature where life feeds on life. He has no will or soul; his existence is determined by the evolutionary concept of the survival of those most in accord with the environment. The physical level of existence is paramount; emotional sensitivity, intelligence, virtue and vice are never affirmed. As nature controls man, survival becomes a function of mechanical instinctive behaviour toward "animal" pursuits. To transcend his animal destiny an individual must will fulfillment of spiritual and intellectual pursuits. He would sever the absolute bond between himself and the environment which determines his actions and negates his mind and soul. He would cement a bond between his will and spirit and body. The essence of naturalism is a comic dialectic: an individual man against the rather cruel and objective world of nature.

Dramatic naturalistic style does not always present a naturalistic world. The form dictates certain conventions of the box-set stage to achieve an illusion of reality: authentic props, scenery with ordinary men in ordinary situations speaking ordinarily without soliloquies or asides. Before the last twenty years or so the degree of reality

indicated whether the style was "realistic" or "naturalistic". If the reality was selective with only some of the conventions, the style was realistic. If the reality was so complete and objective that the stage presented a room with the fourth wall removed, the style was naturalistic. Presently, drama critics do not always make this distinction.

In the dramatic world of the 1950's naturalistic style was quite popular. Sean O'Casey complains in his 1929 essay "Green Goddess of Realism," that the "matter-of-fact, exact-imitation-of-life plays that flit about on the English stage" are the results of the "rage for real, real life on the stage [that] has taken all life out of the drama."¹ Two of John Osborne's first three produced plays are naturalistic. However, both Epitaph for George Dillon (first performed on February 11, 1958 but written before Look Back in Anger in collaboration with Anthony Creighton) and Look Back in Anger are critically deprecated, to an extent, because the all-too-familiar naturalistic style is considered too facile and unimaginative (especially with Osborne's "penchant" for autobiography). Criticism of both plays tends to be antagonistic to the naturalistic style and ignores the vital relationship between the naturalistic style and the themes of the plays. In both plays the naturalistic world is a comic antagonist.

The naturalistic world in Epitaph for George Dillon is objectively presented during much of the first act of the play. The merciless, impersonal presentation of the world is not complicated by any problems of ambivalence and subjectivity that may be created by identi-

¹Barrett H. Clark, ed., European Theories of the Drama, with a supplement on the American Drama, Newly Revised by Henry Popkins (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1965), p. 459.

fication with George Dillon, the hero. He does not appear until the "social situation is presented as something living for the spectator to observe objectively."² The world of the play is not the stereotyped one of naturalistic squalor and poverty. Instead Osborne presents a suburban London working class family. The outer trappings of their lives are quite comfortable; yet their lives are devoid of real values and meaning. Osborne paints a portrait of his Philistines who are the "humble men elevated, for it is now said by their fruits ye shall know them and not by their roots."³ Their world abolished the Edwardian, pre-War classed society but retains the caste of possession; it "rooted" out "morality and man's relation to the universe"⁴ and transplants the doctrine of richness and abundance. In accordance with the echoes of the Edwardian era Osborne sets the action in the sitting-room and hall although much of the major action of Act I is concerned with the naturalistic process of eating a meal after returning from the ordeal of survival by attaining abundance, and not the pre-War ritual of tea and conversation.

The initial picture of the setting is infused with a sense of clutter of the possessions.

Flat against the staircase is a hat and coat stand, shelving hats, coats, magazines, umbrellas, etc., in the midst of which is a vase of everlasting flowers. . . . Downstage of this, set against the "wall" facing into the sitting-room is a radiogram, upon which stands a biscuit barrel and a silver-plated dish containing wax or

²Styan, The Dark Comedy, p. 253.

³"The Epistle to the Philistines (1960)," p. 62.

⁴Ibid.

real fruit. Nearby an arm-chair of the "contemporary" kind faces downstage. Against the upstage wall, right, is a dining-chair. Center, an ornate cocktail cabinet [a prize which the family does not even have occasion to use until the final scene] and another dining-chair⁵

The setting is too large to suggest the usual naturalistic concept of the room as a trap; however, the setting does suggest that the possessions are forming the trap in accord with the necessity of survival through them. As the family gathers for its evening meal and is introduced more or less individually the conversation seems to focus on the physical milieu. There is little in the dialogue to suggest any elevation beyond the barest levels of survival in this Philistine world. With one exception, the members of the family seem controlled by the world which demands the survival through accruing material things. Osborne's Philistines most certainly echo Shaw's Philistine group characterized by their complacency, will-less passivity and concern for the external levels of existence.⁶

Josie, the twenty-year old youngest daughter, is "nobody's fool." Her chief interests are her physical appearance, clothes, and sex. The "boredom in her body" (p. 12) is alleviated by striking a "more or less elegant attitude and a bored expression" (p. 14). She also controls this boredom of the body by total engagement of that body in the frenetic rhythms of jazz. She is simply not aware of the emptiness of her life. "Josie may be funny at times, but she is never consciously so" (p. 14).

⁵ John Osborne and Anthony Creighton, Epitaph for George Dillon (New York: Criterion Books, 1958), p. 1. Subsequent references will be in the text.

⁶ George Bernard Shaw, The Quintessence of Ibsenism, A Dramabook (New York: Hill and Wang, 1913), pp. 39-40.

She affects a pose of boredom when she is naturally bored. She has no introspection of this paradox. Her other strategies of survival include lying and an instinct for self-preservation that affects a blatant disregard of others: she lies about her illness to remain home from work to receive her new slacks (p. 15); she lies about her cigarettes when her aunt requests one (p. 16); she probably lies about her aunt's recurrent caller who should have been properly informed about Ruth's time of arrival (p. 17). Her relationship to her family is not only selfish but also capriciously cruel. She constantly baits Ruth calling her "auntie" when she knows Ruth detests it (p. 18); she seems to aid her mother only to avoid censure and not out of an emotional respect: she exhibits all of the instincts of the predator in her "staking out" a seat in front of the "telly" before the guest can sit there. She also quite unemotionally labels the dinner ritual with its lack of lively conversation as "Silence in the pig-market" and continues with the command to "let the old sow speak first" immediately after she has been forced to thank her mother for the dinner (p. 28). Josie is definitely not an innocent ingenue; she is in an absolute accord with her environment. Therefore, Josie has more interest in money than marriage or even a willed direction for her life: "I don't mind what I do or where I go, so long as my man's got money" (p. 38). Money is the goal of the society; and sex is the directive of her nature. She is always thinking about sex--"I wonder--what it would be like?" (p. 13). So when she immediately retracts her brittle materialistic statement for its romantic counterpart it seems to be merely another instance of the strategy of the selfish: "S-E-X? Oh, sex. Sex doesn't mean a thing to me. In my

way of thinking, love is the most important and beautiful thing in this world and that's got nothing to do with sex" (p. 38).

It is indicative of the society that Mr. Percy Elliot, the patriarch, equates Josie's statement about the importance of money with "thinking about love and S-E-X." His own life has allowed the material to become paramount to everything and everyone. "He is a small, mean little man . . . , with a small man's aggression" (p. 25). His concerns for his family are relegated to questions of his possession of them. He seems less irritated by jealous thoughts about his wife and George and Geoffrey than about the damage to his own image in the community: "I'm going to look a proper bloody fool, aren't I" (p. 28). His mission to eliminate sex in the dark parks ("if I can persuade the council to close the park gates after dark, I shall die a happy man" [p. 38].) seems less an old-fashioned fear for the loss of the virtue of chastity in the youth than another fear of loss of possession--his good name. When the artist seduces his daughter in his own house, under his own eyes, Percy does nothing to stop them because there is little danger of discovery by the neighbors. Perhaps most indicative of Percy's position in the naturalistic world is his utter irascibility and lack of tact and downright cruelty. He does not seem to realize that other people have feelings because his own are so minimal; he does not acknowledge that human relationships are reciprocal. He treats everyone as possessions; and one has no duty to possessions. Mrs. Elliot even has a friend come in "now and again to do a few useful things about the house, . . . things [Percy is] too damn lazy to do . . ." (p. 27).

Josie's older sister Nora is less aware of the cruel way of the

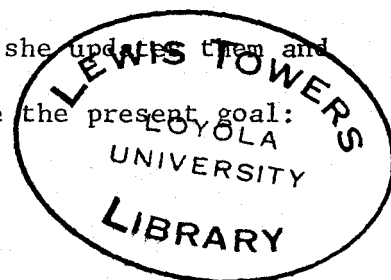
world. If Josie is nobody's fool, Nora is everyone's. Her "naive simplicity in all things and at all time" has resulted in her having "'been let down twice'" (p. 24). The last jilting seems to be a particularly cruel indication of the values of the world--"he just simply said suddenly: 'Well, so long, honey, it's been nice knowing you' and got on a bus going in the opposite direction" (p. 93). Her simplicity is akin to her mother's; Mrs. Elliot "firmly believes that every cloud has a silver lining" (p. 17). Both women are characterized by emotional restraint even though both have an emotional sincerity and sensitivity that the naturalistic world neither recognizes nor rewards. Their survival requires a mask for reality which Shaw would term an ideal or fancy picture of reality demanding "self-denying conformity."⁷ Both attempt to keep the full ugliness of the world out of focus. Nora's genuine affection for her mother is contrasted to Josie's. In Nora's ideal world emotions are important. Instead of an instinctive eating for survival, she eats too many sweets ("You know I'm never hungry, Mum"). Instead of accepting, as Josie does, Mr. Elliot's accord with the values of the world, she censures his meanness comparing him to an animal--"I'd know that cat-like tread anywhere. Trust him not to give a civil answer to a civil question" (pp. 25-6). This attitude toward Mr. Elliot by Nora is comparable to her mother's; she is also affronted by Percy's lack of civility and also compares him to an animal--"The only time your father ever gave a civil answer to a civil question was when he said 'I will' at the wedding. . . . And I know something else that needs drowning" (p. 26). In their ideal concept of

⁷Ibid., p. 44.

reality, Nora and Mrs. Elliot see Percy as an aberrant creature who is not really human. However, Percy is the norm of the society.

Nora also cannot accept the animal sensuality of life. She refuses to drink any wine (until coaxed) because her vision of the romantic wine cannot be extricated from the television picture of "great fat men . . . trampling on the grapes half naked" (p. 40). She cannot accept Josie's attitude that "living" with a man might obviate the necessity of marriage since for Nora it would not be the "proper" thing to do. She also is out of touch with the world of the natural physical nature of sex. She cannot grasp the relationship between sex and the fact that the park gates are open after dark (p. 38). Her entire life seems to be an unconscious strategem to avoid acceptance of the way of the world. The theatre she attends cannot contain any misery; the church is only a place for carrying a banner in a grand Edwardian manner.

Mrs. Elliot invites the artist George Dillon to take her son Raymond's place. Raymond died when the values of heritage, patriotism, honor, morality, and culture were still intact. However, Raymond's death coincided with the death of these ideals; he was "Hard working, conscientious. Like most decent, ordinary lads of his age" (p. 50). Both Josie and Mr. Elliot are more interested in the ends than the means. At various points in the play both are described as lazy; they expend only the energy needed for survival. With and through George Dillon Mrs. Elliot seeks to replace the meanness of the world with a romantic vision of man's virtue and intellectual strivings. Yet, because these values are from the past Edwardian world, she updates them and couples them with the past value that has become the present goal:



abundance through money. In the past the means (sensibility) and the end (money) were inextricable; the present sees only the end. While Mrs. Elliot can extol George as "a fine, clean, upright young man" who is so clever that "one day he's going to be as famous as that Laurence Olivier" she can also prophesy that such ideal will result in money: "he hasn't a lot of money to throw around but he will have, he's that type. He's used to money, you can tell that. He's very cultured" (p. 27). To Mrs. Elliot, money and culture are synonymous. In the naturalistic world of the play, they are inimicable allies at best.

Another facet of Mrs. Elliot's romantic vision is her relationship to Geoffrey Colwyn-Stuart who is "all sweetness and light" (p. 42). Geoffrey is a man with the values of the past intact. His dress is elegant, tasteful, and not really contemporary. His chief interest is in intellectual ideas which are totally based in a world that no longer exists:

You see my theory is that inside every one of us is a lamp. When it's alight, the loves and hates, the ambitions, desires and ideas inside it are burning, and that person is really alive. But there are people who go around every day, at work, at home with their families--they seem normal, but their lamps have gone out. They've simply given up. They've given up being alive (p. 47).

His system of "getting in step with the almighty" (p. 47) is actually valueless in the world Osborne has objectively presented in Act I. Mrs. Elliot believes in it since it is part of her world view. But even she does not live so that her lamp is lit, nor do any of the others, because to succeed passive acceptance is more valuable than willing one's own goals especially when they are not in accord with the society. Mrs. Elliot's selection of George indicates her desire to create a world where Geoffrey's system will work. Geoffrey's belief that everyone in

the Elliot house has the lamp lit, however, is quite expressive of his own blindness to his ideal in the face of overwhelming evidence. In the Elliot household the world is victor, not the inhabitants.

Mrs. Elliot's forty-year-old sister, Ruth, begins the play as an idealist and ends it as a Shavian realist. In the beginning of the play Ruth is just returning from the end of her love affair with a once "promising young man" who not only has remained largely unsuccessful but who also did not share his "piffling little" successes with her when they did occur. Her idealizations of the absolute communication of love and the nature of the artist cause her to terminate their relationship. During the play she also ends a relationship of seventeen years with the Socialist Party, probably because of the same bursting of an idealistic bubble. When she meets George her life is at a stagnation point because she still lives in a little room in her sister's home. Her relationship with George vacillates between her old idealistic expectations and her realistic experience. She sees the artist as quite different from the common man in an almost unnatural light. She sees George's hands as beautiful "like marble, so white and clear" (p. 53). Yet her idealization is colored by her awareness of the world's emptiness and determinism.

The job I do is so hysterically dull that every time I go into that office, and see myself surrounded by those imitation human beings, I feel so trapped and helpless, that I could yell my lungs out with the loneliness and the boredom of it (p. 60).

Although she recognizes the physical nature of the world, she does not seek any immersion in it because it is in conflict with her idealism. When George, the artist, shows himself a natural creature and makes

physical advances, she rejects him and "The Brown Windsor" of love (p. 54). At the end of the play she lays aside her ideals to come into accord with the world as she sees it. She leaves the Elliot home in search of a "scruffy wretch with a thumb-nail sketch of a talent," to spend her time "emptying bits of brown cigarette stubs from his saucer--generally cleaning up" (p. 85). She no longer requires an absolute love or the talent which is to be monumentally successful. In the world of the play, the scruffy artist will fare better. She seems to be making a choice analogous to that Candida makes--to control a Morell and not a Marchbanks. She chooses the "weaker of the two" to make "with the labor of[her] hands and the love of[her] heart. . . . the sum of all loving care"⁸ Ruth finally realizes that "even bad artists have their place in the scheme of things" (p. 63).

After the objective view of the naturalistic world, George Dillon, the artist is introduced in the play. An artist is probably the consummate foe of this world. The artist is the epitome of the individual who would transcend the physical limitations and goals toward a union of will-spirit-body. His concerns are control of the body to allow the spirit to rise. The mere detail and focus which the play has given to the naturalistic world and the fact that George is introduced as the artist but never proves his artistry points to the certain winner of the comic contest: the world of nature. The action of the play establishes the extant victory of the world over the artist. George, the would-be artist, is foiled by his animal appetites and the

⁸Candida, A Pleasant Play (Baltimore: Penquin Books, 1967), p. 74. Subsequent references will appear in the text.

world's control of his art. His body betrays him by its tuberculosis breakdown which is probably effected by the weakened state of an "unnatural" vegetarian. He is further trapped into a marriage with Josie because he has lucklessly impregnated her. Part of the trap is his misreading of Josie as an innocent albeit frustrated ingenue. His desperate need for material abundance progressively worsens from his living with the Elliot's to his application for welfare sustenance, to his accepting Barney Evans, who "has never had a doubt about anything" (p. 73) in his fifty years, and Barney's suggestion to dirty up his play, eliminate the "high brow stuff", and to retitle it "The Telephone Tart" and to send it on tour (p. 76).

At the end of the play George is inured in the naturalistic world; but he does not grant the world total victory since he still retains his position as entertainer/artist. However, this is a precarious impasse. In the world that controls or determines his actions he is a G. B. Shaw ("Turned out to be Bernard Shaw, after all eh?" [p. 93]). However, because of the emphasis upon the physical level of existence, the artist has only to entertain with sordid, trivial subjects on the most overt elementary levels. These levels are the most important in the world of the play. In his instructions to George, Barney states that "People want action, excitement. I know--you think you're Bernard Shaw. But where's he today?" (p. 75). But the audience uses the artists after they are in accord with the world--as those who can revive them enough to continue their acts of survival. The audience does not need artists before or during these acts. As long as the artists can pull their own weight in the society they

will be tolerated; they will never be necessary.

Because of the destined control of man in the world, George's own situation closely parallels the contrived well-made plot suggested by Barney: "Get someone in the family way in the Third Act--you're halfway there" (p. 77). The mechanical plot of a well-made play can perfectly mirror the naturalistic world of this play. Consequently, the ostensive action or plot of Epitaph for George Dillon is a well-made play structure which Osborne believes must be "dependent on a closed social system, itself ritualized outwardly in everyday life . . ."⁹ Most of Osborne's other plays do not present naturalistic worlds and so do not use this plot structure. This structure should not be criticised because of overuse and abuse by other playwrights. The play is not merely a "typically too-well-made play of its period," as Trussler suggests.¹⁰ The high points of the action at the ends of the acts are decisive victories of the world over George and are not capriciously chosen for action and excitement. Act I--George arrives at the Elliot house; Act II--George "seduces" Josie under the watchful eyes of her father (a scene à faire?); Act III, 1--George discovers his tuberculosis almost simultaneously with the compromising of his art; Act III, 2--George returns from the sanatorium preparing to remain with the Elliots, marry Josie, and reign as the G. B. Shaw of their world. Unlike Osborne's other plays, Epitaph for George Dillon has a definite ending. Osborne has stated that he never knows "how

⁹ "John Osborne on the thesis business," p. 20.

¹⁰ John Osborne, p. 15.

to finish a play"; "there are no last acts any more in life, so how can we find any in the theatre. There are no easy solutions."¹¹ The definite ending in this play indicates the exact nature of its comic contest--in the naturalistic world nature is destiny.

The hero's interior comic dialectic in Osborne's other plays is only half-conscious; that is, usually the Osborne hero does not realize a discrepancy between his ideal self and his real self until some sort of recognition scene. George Dillon enters the Elliot home with an awareness of both his ideal image of the artist and his human nature in the naturalistic world. He is a "walking conflation in fact" (p. 29). George chooses to present the image of the artist preeminently. His image of heightened sensibility and intelligence causes a realization that the pain in life is caused by the awareness of the way of the world: "But life isn't simple, and, if you've any brains in your head at all, it's frankly a pain in the arse" (p. 47). He says that his brains require that all "comforting myths" (p. 48) be abolished so that man can confront any doubts that he must have about his existence unless he is a Philistine like Josie and Mr. Elliot. It is important that Josie and Mr. Elliot never approach George as the supersensitive individual, only the celebrity and money winner. George believes his role as the intelligent seer casts him as a foe of commonness. In the theatre he sees himself as one against the audience; his role as entertainer elevates him:

¹¹Quoted in Leonard Lyon's column, New York Post, 12 November 1963, p. 60.

I attract hostility. I seem to be on heat for it. Whenever I step out on to those boards--immediately from the very first moment I show my face--I know I've got to fight almost every one of those people in the auditorium. . . . even in the hatred of the majority, there's a kind of triumph because I know that, although they'd never admit it, they secretly respect me (pp. 56-7).

The phrase "on heat" seems to indicate that this role of the artist is intrinsically unnatural since it is a feminine quality in the natural world. In the Elliot home he sees his benefactors as less than truly human and alive because they "don't merely act and talk like caricatures! . . . Their existence is one great cliché that they carry about with them like a snail in his little house . . . " (p. 59). Notice the animal imagery. He is a man with the zest for life that the others could not attain: "I have a mind and feelings that are all fingertips" (p. 59). As a Bernard Shaw he sees his relationship to the older Ruth as similar to that of Marchbanks to Candida.

Ironically, as George's brain tells him that he is more sensitive and intelligent than the others it also removes the comforting myth that these qualities are of any value in the world. As a matter of fact they may not even really exist. For in a world of "facts" and external things, it does not even matter whether George is really an artist--thus the ambivalence presented in the play which is similar to the ambivalent view Shaw presents of Marchbanks in Candida. There is no way to prove conclusively the existence of George's artistry. Therefore, George stresses that even though he may have "the same symptoms as talent, the pain, the ugly swellings, the lot" he will never know "whether or not the diagnosis is correct" (p. 62). The "never" is final; in the world presented in the play there would be

few "experts," who could answer George's question. These experts would have to be surviving idealists, like Ruth was before the action of the play.

George is aware that if talent can exist in the natural world it would be something quite inimical to life. He describes talent in disease images. Ruth tells him that he is "sick with it"; George retorts that "It's a disease some of us long to have. . . . you must know it's incurable" (p. 62). Talent is further described as the same disease which does conquer George: galloping consumption. The natural world cannot allow such a disease to exist; it conquers this willed disease with a natural one. George, as a natural creature, instinctively realizes this during his war experience that most closely mirrors the world of nature. At that time he discovers that his "whole reason for existence"--his art--was "so hideously trivial and unimportant, so divorced from living, and the real world" (p. 63). As a man of the real world George is cruel, nonreligious, and requires the physical comfort of sex--"Lust, the harshest detergent of them all, the expense of spirit in a waste of shame" (p. 66).

George begins the play with an awareness of his ambivalence; but it is not suggested that the action of the play will be a true contest between his ideal and real selves. George's art is artifice. It must be willed--"studied, premeditated" (p. 64). He constantly must be on guard to present the role to the world. In the naturalistic world it requires too much more energy than survival. The two most in accord with this world, Josie and Percy, are consistently

labelled "lazy". Ruth believes that George will burn himself out: "I know I shall see fatigue and fear in your eyes sooner or later" (p. 55). It seems that the greater energy required to will the disease of talent will be overcome by the rebellion of his body. His disease of talent (if it exists) is cured simultaneously with his bodily disease.

Yet, this does not mean that George will not continue to emotionally will the artist's nature. He, like Marchbanks, still has the artist's heart, but with the acceptance of the world. "He has learnt to live without happiness" (Candida, p. 75). George's self-written epitaph presents his intellectual acceptance of the results of his ambivalent nature. The victor is the natural self.

"Here lies the body of George Dillon, aged thirty-four--or thereabouts--who thought, who hoped, he was that mysterious, ridiculous being called an artist. He never allowed himself one day of peace. He worshipped the physical things of this world, and was betrayed by his own body. He loved also the things of the mind, but his own brain was a cripple from the waist down. . . . He was a bit of a bore, and frankly, rather useless. But the germs loved him" (p. 87).

The epitaph celebrates the natural process even to the life feeding upon life--"the germs loved him." But the tone is one of defeat; the closer he is to some type of success as the popular artist, the more useless he feels because he is still emotionally applying the standards of his spirit to his art. In explaining the ambivalence to Ruth, George stresses the supremacy of the world of chance vs. the world of the spirit.

Just a trip on the stage-cloth, and Lear teeters on, his crown round his ears, his grubby tights full of mothholes. . . . And the less sure we are of our pathetic little divine rights, the

stronger the elastic we should use (pp. 86-7).

He even begs Ruth not to leave him alone, even though the moment at the end of the play sees him entering the community through the Eliots. Ruth, of all those in this world, which she is leaving, is the expert who could verify his talent. After she leaves, both George and the audience will never know whether he is "a good writer frustrated by the commercial theatre and suburban morality" or "a bad writer who has at last met himself face to face."¹² The play hardly misfires because of the doubt about George; this doubt is a necessary attribute of his world. The interior world needs such constant safeguarding that George finally resigns himself to the success of the natural world where any playwright can be Bernard Shaw. George does recognize and accept this world; he cannot forgive its victory. Instead of celebrating with the world of nature on the occasion of the marriage and birth, he can think only of death--the destiny of all creatures.

In Look Back in Anger the naturalistic world is not objectively presented. Certainly, the play begins as Epitaph for George Dillon with the disclosure of a naturalistically detailed set.

The scene is a fairly large attic room, at the top of a large Victorian house. The ceiling slopes down quite sharply . . . two small low windows. In front of these is a dark oak dressing table. Most of the furniture is simple, and rather old. . . . double bed, running the length of most of the back wall, the rest of which is taken up with a shelf of books. . . . below the bed is a heavy chest of drawers, covered with books, neckties and odds and ends, including a large, tattered toy teddy bear and soft, woolly squirrel. . . . light comes through it from a skylight beyond. Below the wardrobe is a gas stove, and besides this a wooden food cupboard, on which is a small, portable radio. . . .

¹²Kenneth Tynan, Curtains. Selections from the Drama Criticism and Related Writings (New York: Atheneum, 1961), p. 207.

a sturdy dining table and three chairs, . . . two deep, shabby leather armchairs.¹³

Even more than the setting of Epitaph for George Dillon this set suggests the "traditional room of the naturalistic theatre: the room as trap, with the sounds and message of a determining and frustrating world coming in from outside; . . ."¹⁴ However, the naturalistic world of cruel life feeding on life is not the objective comic antagonist in this play. Unlike Epitaph for George Dillon, Look Back in Anger does not present the irrevocable workings of a world which crushes spirit, intellect, and exalts the physical and material realities. It does not present characters who have no choice between cruelty or defeat; physical survival or spiritual vitality. Instead, Look Back in Anger presents a hero who believes he is destined by the world of nature to purely mechanical and animal pursuits. The dialectic in this play is a contest between two visions Jimmy Porter has of himself: the transcending tragic hero and the destined animal. He sees his existence as a simple alternative between his will and acceptance of an animal destiny. Yet, these visions are unrealistic polar opposites, and the winner in the play is the middle ground--the realistic human being who has a will but is also a being with an animal nature. The movement of the play is toward Jimmy's recognition and acceptance of his natural human existence. The contest is subjective. The world outside of Jimmy's room does not loom largely in this play.

¹³ John Osborne, Look Back in Anger, Bantam Books Classic Edition (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1959), p. 1. Subsequent references will be in the text.

¹⁴ Raymond Williams, Drama From Ibsen to Brecht (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 318-9.

The play begins not with the objective view of a world as in Epitaph for George Dillon but with Jimmy speaking about the world. Consequently, there are very few scenes in which Jimmy does not appear; and the outside world of the play remains quite out of focus.

An essential characteristic of the tragic hero for Jimmy is the constant questioning of the world in order to will an ideal. The tragic hero must not accept the world as it is. He must be a superior creature with the energy, sensitivity, and intelligence to transcend human limitations. This concept of his own tragic role engenders Jimmy Porter's vision of mankind. If humans are anything less than this ideal, then they are animals controlled by nature. Jimmy, the tragic hero, believes these attributes requisite to manhood. If man cannot will his own ideals he must logically be regulated by the world. His ideal vision requires that he be a verbal foe of the contemporary society. He revels in this role because it elevates him above the animals of the natural world with their mindless determinism. Therefore, Jimmy squelches any signs of complacency by postures of restlessness, pride, criticism. His initial description in the play stresses the signals of his tragic role, while also implying his descent into the naturalistic one.

He is a disconcerting mixture of sincerity and cheerful malice, of tenderness and freebooting cruelty; restless, importunate, full of pride, a combination which alienates the sensitive and the insensitive alike. Blistering honesty, or apparent honesty, like his, makes few friends. . . . To be as vehement as he is is to be almost non-committal (p. 2).

Jimmy's lack of compromise with the society also indicates that his role as the critic of society be basically unsuccessful. He must

always be the critic who never persuades the world. Jimmy can censure the world only from a position of disenfranchisement. Although he is educated, he is only a sweet-stall proprietor. His wife tells her father that "He seems to have been as happy doing this as anything else" (p. 79). If he used his education he might be too immersed in the world.

Jimmy's vision of his world is that it is a hostile and empty place with no values. As malcontent, his role is to supply this emptiness with values or ideals. Jimmy finds these ideals in the past Edwardian society. But he can also criticize many of these same values as causes of the contemporary emptiness. He can look to the past angrily as the cause of the vacuous society and angrily look beyond the society to the past for cures. The title of the play focuses upon the ambivalent nature of his heroic role. Some criticize the play because Jimmy's stance is not clearly and intellectually delineated. In "They Call It Cricket" Osborne answers criticism of the play's and Jimmy's undefined social targets:

A great deal of the L. J. [Lucky Jim] gibberish has been promoted by a few words I put into the mouth of Jimmy Porter. These were: "There aren't any good, brave causes left." Immediately they heard this, all the shallow heads with their savage thirst for trimmed-off explanations got to work on it, and they had enough new symbols to play about with happily and fill their columns for half a year. They believed him, . . . They were incapable of recognizing the texture of ordinary despair, the way it expresses itself in rhetoric and gestures that may perhaps look shabby, but are seldom simple. It is too simple to say that Jimmy Porter himself believed that there were no good, brave causes left, . . .¹⁵

The focus of the play is upon the pathos and heroics of the stance, not the substance of it. This is not a social drama with Jimmy Porter

as Osborne's spokesman.

The action of Look Back in Anger reveals the conflict between Jimmy's idealization of himself, his dehumanization of himself and others, and the objective human condition he must come to accept. The human reality is presented through Alison, Jimmy's wife, and Cliff, his best and only real friend. In Epitaph for George Dillon, George's statements about the naturalistic determinism of his society are constantly verified because the world is shown. When he says the society is materialistic and cruel, these qualities are illustrated by the other characters. When Jimmy Porter sees men as animals in a destined environment, he is constantly proven incorrect. The invalidity of his vision is illustrated by the confinement of the play to the naturalistic one-room setting. Even though this setting may reinforce Jimmy's image of men, the trapped animals, it really shows the adaptability and essential goodness of Cliff and Alison.

Cliff's introduction highlights his naturalness as a human--not as a cruel mechanical-animal.

He is easy and relaxed, almost to lethargy with the rather sad, natural intelligence of the self-taught. If JIMMY alienates love, CLIFF seems to exact it--demonstrations of it, at least, even from the cautious. He is a soothing, natural counterpart to JIMMY (p. 2).

Cliff is part of the comic natural world which is a composite of nature, emotions, and intelligence. Alison also wears the acceptance of the world in her "key of well-bred malaise" (p. 2) without the notion of will-less mechanical control; as a matter of fact, the abuse that she tolerates from Jimmy would propel a natural animal into physical com-

bat or flight. She does neither. However, it is exactly this conformity that Jimmy's dialectical visions eliminate. The common characteristic of both visions is elevation. If he is idealistic, then he is elevated by a will and intelligence; if he is determined, then he is elevated by physical strength and cunning. Either of these postures provide a singular transcendence over other men that he seeks throughout the play.

The first scene of the play presents Jimmy in a constant maneuver for "tragic" supremacy. He begins by turning a human weakness into a diatribe against the society. He feels ignorant because half of an article in the Sunday papers on the English novel is in French. But when Alison and Cliff focus on his ignorance of French--which they both share--instead of his nationalistic ideal of writing about English things in the English language, he seeks a more positive, unequivocal self-aggrandizement: his voracious appetite and energy. "People like me don't get fat. . . . We just burn everything up"(p. 5). He continues the process of elevation by extolling his finesse: "I'm the only one who knows how to treat a paper, or anything else, in this house" (p. 5). This superiority smacks of the Edwardian concern for doing things in the "proper" manner. As he continues the weekly ritual of reading the Sunday papers, he exposes his own sensitivity and degrades Alison's and Cliff's. Whenever he feels the loss of his audience's attention he counters by asking questions about his reading which he knows they probably cannot answer. "Did you read Priestley's piece this week? Why on earth I ask, I don't know. I know damned well

you haven't. . . . Nobody reads it except me. Nobody can be bothered" (p. 8). He then states that their sloth is designed to drive him mad; thus, he places himself in the position of the tragic victim. Finally, he proffers his definition of humanity. He tells them that what he requires of them is "ordinary"; since he has already shown their lack of these qualities and his possession of them, he believes they are quite extraordinary. He begins with the tragic address to the diety:

Oh heavens, how I long for a little ordinary human enthusiasm. Just enthusiasm--that's all. I want to hear a warm, thrilling voice cry out Hallelujah! (He bangs his breast theatrically.) Hallelujah! I'm alive! I've an idea. Why don't we have a little game? Let's pretend that we're human beings, and that we're actually alive. Just for a while. What do you say? Let's pretend we're human (p. 9).

Against the context of this attack, both Cliff and Alison have amply demonstrated their humanity through their forbearance, patience, and concern for each other's and Jimmy's feelings.

Jimmy then proceeds to look to the past in anger condemning the Edwardian values. He sees Alison's father as the representative of this past: "Daddy--still casts well-fed glances back to the Edwardian twilight from his comfortable disenfranchised wilderness" (p. 9).

Through another perspective, Jimmy could be referring to himself. Most of Jimmy's attacks are directly aimed at Alison who represents the offspring of the Edwardian value system. So, the hero alternately condemns her for being heir to the system and safeguarding it and for being heir and abandoning it. Cliff may intercept a barb, but it is most often not aimed at him. Jimmy's relationship with Cliff is usually the superior one of caretaker: "What do you think you're going to

do when I'm not around to look after you?" (p. 9). Cliff doesn't really need Jimmy's care as a helpless animal might. Cliff knows that Jimmy "gets on" with him because he is "common as dirt" (p. 30) and thereby allows Jimmy to assume a superior posture. Cliff's commonness points to his comic human ability to survive. Even the animal games that he plays with Jimmy--"Eek! Eek! I'm a mouse. . . . That's a Morris Dance strictly for mice" (p. 31)--illustrates his perception of Jimmy's visions of himself. Because of their intention, to boost Jimmy's ego, the games do not lessen Cliff's human status.

More importantly than Alison's role as Edwardian offspring is her role as Jimmy's lover. For Jimmy, Alison constantly threatens to bring his immersion into the world of humanity into focus. His posturing of either hero or animal is an attempt to avoid recognition and acceptance of his humanity which needs the comfort and assurance of love and communion with another human being. Alison tells Cliff that Jimmy actually "taunted" her with her virginity when they were first married--"as if I had deceived him in some strange way. He seemed to think an untouched woman would defile him" (p. 28). This attitude is part of Jimmy's image as the idealistic, but tragic hero. Virginity is an ideal which he espouses, not one that he expects to find in existence in the world. Its possession in another person can only compromise his superiority, and prove his naturalistic vision of other men invalid. They can have ideals, too. Another fear would be operant if he knew about Alison's pregnancy: "He'll suspect my motives at once. He never stops telling himself that I know how vulnerable he is.

. . . he'd feel hoaxed, as if I were trying to kill him in the worst way of all" (p. 28). A child would be certain testament of mere human stature--an emblem of his vulnerability to the physical world and to the emotional one of love. Alison's pregnancy sharply delineates the difference between the world view of Look Back in Anger and that of Epitaph for George Dillon. Even though Jimmy might choose to believe that the pregnancy would be evidence of non-idealistic stature thereby plunging him into a purely animal world where he is the prey of Alison, the concept of Alison's love and concern for him distinguishes their intercourse from George and Josie's mechanical coupling.

The attack on Alison that Jimmy initiates by reference to her father unerringly proceeds from the minor concerns of her Edwardian connections to the essential issue of their relationship. The action is descending; Jimmy topples from his tragic idealistic position to recognition of the real nature of humanity to reactionary immersion in the mire and strength of a purely naturalistic existence. After he castigates her father and the Edwardians for living in the past he ironically chastises Alison for living in the present. "She's a great one for getting used to things. If she were to die, and wake up in paradise--after the first five minutes, she'd have got used to it" (p. 10). When he establishes her comic spirit he must declare his tragic one as the man who upholds an ideal which is no longer admired --Edwardian patriotism:

✓ I suppose people like me aren't supposed to be very patriotic. .
 . . If you've no world of your own, its rather pleasant to regret

the passing of someone else's (p. 11).

He re-attacks Alison's complacency by comparing her to a former mistress he had when he was eighteen: she had "more animation in her little finger than you two put together. . . . Even to sit on the top of a bus with her was like setting out with Ulysses." Of course, the comparison attacks Alison on two levels--her compromise with life and their love. After praising one of Alison's friends for his "guts" and "sensitivity" (covertly praising himself), he seems to be loosing his energy until Alison "quietly and earnestly" (p. 13) requests that he desist. The appeal only demands, to Jimmy, further displays of energy and rancor.

He attacks her family once again. Her brother Nigel is the target--this time:

Now Nigel is just about as vague as you can get without being actually invisible. And invisible politicians aren't much use to anyone--not even to his supporters! And nothing is more vague about Nigel than his knowledge. His knowledge of life and ordinary human beings is so hazy, he really deserves some sort of decoration for it-- . . . The only thing he can do--seek sanctuary in his own stupidity (pp. 14-15).

His description of Nigel is ironically applicable to Jimmy himself. Jimmy does not see this. He really is not as interested in the substance as in the sting of his rhetoric. When Alison and Cliff do not respond, he believes that the natural world has cheated him out of their response: "It's started to rain. That's all it needs. This room and the rain" (p. 15).

He launches a direct offensive against Alison focusing on her Edwardian values and skirting the essential issues of their physical

and emotional relationship in marriage. Again, he simultaneously criticizes both her acceptance and rejection of the past values.

In fact, if my pronunciation is at fault, she'll probably wait for a suitably public moment to correct it. Here it is. I quote: Pusillanimous. Adjective. Wanting of a firmness of mind, of small courage, having a little mind, mean spirited, cowardly, timid of mind. . . . That's my wife! That's her isn't it? Behold Lady Pusillanimous (p. 17).

Because Alison is "used to these carefully rehearsed attacks" (p. 17) she does not respond. The ritualistic nature of the attacks indicates that Jimmy does not really expect response--it would indicate too much spirit, bringing his audience in proximity with himself.

Critics complain that Jimmy rants and raves dully and repetitiously throughout the play. His posturings certainly are repetitious; and, up to this point in the plot, they have been singular attempts to establish idealistic transcendence. However, a close analysis of his remaining rhetoric reveals a dynamic conflict between his vision of himself as tragic hero or his vision of himself as animal AND what his nature really is. The postures of either animal or idealistic man are stratagems to avoid recognition of life. After his confused attack on Alison's inner qualities, he elects the posture of the naturalistic animal whose concerns are chiefly material and physical. The reason for this reversion to the physical world seems an anomaly. But, he plunges into his alternate vision of the world because he seeks more obvious control of Alison. She will not respond to mental abuse. Her unresponsive dullness is consistent with his tragic vision of the world's creatures as animals. But, this is an unsatisfactory control

for Jimmy Porter. It's too passive. The only way that he can allow himself control is in the naturalistic world where brute strength can rule and physical instincts can explain any dependency or weakness of the flesh. Of course, this world is determined and questions of the human will and spirit are never answered. However, Jimmy would rather find strength and control in this naturalistic world--if it is not possible in the ideal tragic one. He cannot admit his human need for strength through others, for comfort, or solace, or love.

As the natural animal, Jimmy first displays concern for his possessions when he complains about Cliff's reading of his papers. He becomes irritable when the iron (which he had heretofore not noticed) interferes with the radio and turns it off. His rancor is no longer expressed verbally but physically. When Alison criticizes this behaviour Jimmy gains more control of the situation by deprecating the physical qualities of women emphasizing their primitive natures. "When you see a woman in front of her bedroom mirror, you realize what a refined sort of butcher she is. . . . Those primitive hands would have your guts out in no time" (pp. 20-1). His vision of the naturalistic world is reflected in his constant animal imagery. He connects dancing with the "mating season" and finally ends in physical abuse and mastery of both Cliff, who is pushed, and Alison, who is the final victim of Cliff's push by Jimmy. Alison connects all this activity with a "zoo" (p. 23). Only when Jimmy reaches this highest level of mastery in the low animal world does he begin to display some sort of ordinary human sorrow for his actions and concern for others. He leaves the room.

When Jimmy returns his mood seems to be compromised. He does establish ideological superiority by stating that his Puritan sensibilities are askance at the "pretty silly slobbering" of Alison and Cliff. He continues to "re-establish himself" (p. 31) by speaking of Cliff in the animal image of the mouse. Yet, this animal picture is not as vicious as the zoo scene earlier. After Cliff exits, Jimmy begins to lucidly explain his behaviour. He does recognize his role playing, but he does not accept the impossibility that his visions are correct. The world that really exists that Jimmy does recognize is one where man is a physical, spiritual, and communal being:

There's hardly a moment when I'm not--watching and wanting you. I've got to hit out somehow. Nearly four years of being in the same room with you, night and day, and I still can't stop my sweat breaking out when I see you doing--something as ordinary as leaning over an ironing board. . . . Trouble is you get used to people. Even their trivialities become indispensable to you. Indispensable, and a little mysterious (p. 33).

This recognition of the real nature of his relationship to Alison is so unacceptable to Jimmy he almost immediately resorts to the game of bears and squirrels. This game is his strategy:

one way of escaping from everything--a sort of unholy priest-hole of beings animals to one another. We could become little furry brains. . . . A silly symphony for people who couldn't bear the pain of being human beings any longer (p. 54).

The game is occasioned by confrontation with the real nature of the world and human beings. Jimmy recognizes it as a game. It is not on the same level as his two other world views that he would will into existence. In both of these worlds some sort of transcendence is possible for him.

The game ends abruptly when one of Alison's friends calls introducing reality and necessitating one of Jimmy's roles. He chooses the ugly animal guise. Helena, who will soon visit the naturalistic trap, becomes one of his "natural enemies." Jimmy labels himself "predatory" using the "naturalistic trap" as his excuse: "Living night and day with another human being has made me predatory and suspicious." Searching Alison's belongings is rationalized because he is "pretty certain" (pp. 36-7) of finding something in the determined world. In his naturalistic state he parleys his physical strength into a good to control Alison. He now evaluates her complacency as too non-realistic for the world of nature while it previously was too naturalistic for his tragic stance:

Oh, my dear wife, you've got so much to learn. I only hope you learn it one day. If only something--something would happen to you, and wake you out of your beauty sleep! If you could have a child, and it would die. . . . I wonder if you might even become a recognizable human being yourself (p. 39).

He continues her descent through his gross animal image of their sexual relationship. But as she descends, he rises becoming the tragic victim of her cruel naturalism.

She has the passion of a python. She just devours me whole every time, as if I were some over-large rabbit. That's me. That bulge around her navel-- . . . it's me. Me, buried alive down there, and going mad, smothered in that peaceful looking coil. . . . You'd think that this indigestible mess would stir up some kind of tremor in those distended, overfed tripes-- . . . (pp. 39-40)..

The remaining action of the play brings Jimmy to his comic impasse. He comes to an acceptance of the comic world and its values and pain. He recognizes the impossibility of the tragic stance for him, since it has no substantive basis, and the inaccuracy of the natu-

realistic vision in a world where feelings and intelligence can exist. The acceptance is effected through the loss and recovery of his primary target--Alison. In Act II, Jimmy engages in his instinctive battle with Helena for the possession of Alison. The battle ends in the loss of Alison but the winning of Helena, the representative of the "royalty of middle-class womanhood" with a "sense of modestly exalted responsibility" (pp. 41-2). Helena is won because her vision of reality tries to ignore the physical which Jimmy presents to her. She is engaged by his animal magnetism: "I've never seen such hatred in someone's eyes before. It's horrifying. Horrifying. . . . and oddly exciting" (p. 44). Jimmy assails Helena from the naturalistic world of brute force because it is his stronger area of superiority with her. Her kind possess many of the values of his ideal tragic posture. Ironically, he also believes that her kind is the old order that has wounded his "poor old charger . . . all tricked out and caparisoned in discredited passions and ideals!" Now he believes that brawling is "the only thing left I'm any good at" (p. 60). He elevates himself through his experiences in the cruel world. "I knew more about--love . . . betrayal . . . and death, when I was ten years old than you will probably ever know all your life" (pp. 69-70).

Because he finds that Alison cannot be persuaded to remain by brute strength, Jimmy again resorts to his tragic stance. He speaks of himself in Christ images or the image of the ultimate sensitive man (in keeping with his belief that failure in this world is caused because men are animals): "You Judas! You phlegm! . . . Peace! God! She wants peace! . . . My heart is so full, I feel ill--and she wants

peace" (p. 70)! When his strategy of the idealist fails, he reverses to the strategy of the natural man who knows more of life than Alison: "I want to stand up in your tears, and splash about in them, and sing. I want to be there when you grovel. . . . I want to see your face rubbed in the mud--that's all I can hope for. There's nothing else I want any longer" (p. 71).

As Alison returns after the loss of her child Jimmy bids farewell to Helena. When he does, he is no longer angry--but resigned. His final speech to her is still critical of her ideals but not to promote his superiority. He does not speak of the naturalistic world, but the real one: "They all want to escape from the pain of being alive. And, most of all, from love" (p. 115). The speech is not rhetorical; it is fact. As he explains his earlier ambivalence to Alison, his speech ends with a realization of the human need for immersion into the world with other humans:

Was I really wrong to believe that there's a--kind of--burning virility of mind and spirit that looks for something as powerful as itself? [tragic stance] The heaviest, strongest creatures in this world seem to be the loneliest. [naturalistic stance] . . . That voice that cries out doesn't have to be a weakling's, does it (p. 116)?

The speech also indicates his realization of the incompatibility of his tragic or naturalistic stance with the human need. The loss of Alison precipitates the acceptance of reality. Therefore, when Alison collapses at his feet and exclaims that she is in the mud, and grovelling as he had directed her (p. 118) Jimmy cannot allow her to remain in her position of inferiority. He stops her and raises her to him. The possibility of the cruel world of nature where life feeds on life (the

loss of the child) and strength conquer all is obliterated by his need for her.

Acceptance of his real nature also requires that he abandon the game of the bears and squirrels. The stage directions at the end of the play stress that the game is played with "a kind of mocking irony" (p. 119). The ironic tone of the last speech of the play is important: it most importantly discredits criticism that the play is circular and therefore really naturalistic. Tony Richardson, the director, states that the play is hopeful since they are playing this game for the last time.¹⁶ The hopefulness indicates the movement of the play towards Jimmy's acceptance of the real nature of his life. The final speech not only shows Jimmy abandoning the game of the bears and the squirrels but also his two visions of existence which have been proven invalid: "There are cruel steel traps lying about everywhere [naturalism], just waiting for rather mad, slightly satanic [tragic idealism], and very timid little animals. Right" (p. 119).

However, a hopeful ending is not a happy one. The acceptance at the end of the play is far from a happy ending. There is no indication that Jimmy will ever wish to immerse himself in the comic world. His stance at the end of the play is not the usual comic jubilation but fatigue. When he realizes his failure to transcend in either one of his visions he does not see his love for Alison as a triumph. He merely says: "I may be a lost cause, but I thought if you loved me, it

¹⁶Martin Banham, Osborne (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1969), p. 18.

needn't matter" (p. 118). He does not say it "does" not matter. The very need of playing the animal game even one more time points to Jimmy's reservations--acceptance without happiness or forgiveness. Osborne states that the "end of the play is sour, unyielding, unhappy. They . . . are making amends no more. They won't be happy."¹⁷

Osborne consistently aims, as all ironic comic dramatists, for the working of the audience's minds through their feelings.¹⁸ In each of the plays this is achieved through the interaction of the comic visions and the theatrical styles. In Look Back in Anger the effect is achieved through anger:

"I have always thought embarrassing an audience marvelous. Not angering them by exposing oneself, but angering by exposing their feelings."¹⁹

The feelings of the audience which engender further feelings of anger are focused upon Jimmy Porter. He engages feelings in his posture as the tragic idealist who rails against the acceptance of what he sees as a sordid, mechanical existence OR in his role as the champion of naturalistic strength. The audience admires the energy and vitality of his stance and sympathizes with his "genuine misery."²⁰ Yet, this engagement by Jimmy angers because the audience also can lucidly and with detachment see that the world Jimmy lives in is NOT naturalistic but is

¹⁷ "'Angry Young Man' Cools," The Courier-Journal and Times, (Louisville) 18 June 1972, p. 10.

¹⁸ Styan, The Dark Comedy, p. 257.

¹⁹ "'Angry Young Man' Cools," p. 10,

²⁰ Styan, The Dark Comedy, p. 258.

a world of "'reasonably normal and well-disposed people.'"²¹ Even as the audience pities Jimmy's loss of that transcendent self-image as he recognizes his real humanity (precipitated by the departure of both Alison and Cliff), they are angered by this pity. After all, Jimmy shares their humanity; if they pity him, they pity themselves. Osborne implies this inter-relationship when he uses the term "anger." Paradoxically, at the end of the play, an audience's anger at their feelings for Jimmy Porter is not so different from Jimmy's anger at his feelings about the human condition.

Such ambivalence of audience response is not really achieved in Epitaph for George Dillon; in this play the naturalistic vision of the world is true. Therefore, there are essentially no vital and admirable attempts at transcendence--even though an artist would be a more classic tragic figure than a sweet-stall operator. The structure of the play establishes the supremacy of the world before George Dillon is introduced. The focus upon the world with the plethora of naturalistic detailing evokes a feeling of disdain for the world and sympathy for its inhabitants. The audience understands the determinism but pities its victims. Consequently, the sympathy the audience feels for George is not because he is struggling in vain against the world. George, with his weakened physical vitality, already knows the outcome of his struggle. He utters no tragic affirmations of transcendence throughout the play. But Osborne intensifies the usual engagement of

²¹A. E. Dyson, "Look Back in Anger," The Critical Quarterly, I, iv (1959), p. 318, quoted in Styan, The Dark Comedy, p. 258.

the naturalistic stage in this play through his presentation of George's final interior resistance to the world that he accepts intellectually but not emotionally--acceptance without forgiveness. The audience can admire, without anger, George's final position--although he is ostensibly at his lowest point. The audience can also pity George because he (like the audience) is aware of the futility of any resistance to such a world at all.

CHAPTER III

IRONIC CONFRONTATION SET TO MUSIC--

THE ENTERTAINER AND THE WORLD

OF PAUL SLICKEY

Osborne eliminates both the naturalistic stage and the naturalistic world from his dramatic works after Look Back in Anger and Epitaph for George Dillon. In the introduction note to The Entertainer Osborne states that the "so-called naturalistic stage" is a limited solution to the dramatist's "eternal problems of time and space."¹ Although Osborne's first two plays are not really restricted by time, he does adhere to the naturalistic stage's restriction of place. The naturalistic world is a trap for the man-animal; the almost claustrophobic setting that the staging dictates reinforces the restrictive nature of the world view. Osborne abandons the naturalistic stage when it no longer functions to mirror the comic antagonist in the plays.

Brecht's epic theatre solves Osborne's problem of time and space restriction in five of his ironic comedies: The Entertainer (1957), The World of Paul Slickey (1959), Luther (1961), A Patriot For Me (1965) and A Place Calling Itself Rome (1973). Brecht's theatre also complements the ironic and comic subject of Osborne's dramas. The

¹The Entertainer (New York: Criterion Books, 1958), p. 9.

adoption of Brechtian technique is not a simple instance of Osborne, the inartistic opportunist and popular dramatist, grafting the most popular and avant-garde dramatic form in England² to his preachings. It would be unlikely for Osborne to be either unaware of the popular trends in the English theatre or uninterested in utilizing them for his plays. It would be equally unlikely that Osborne would adopt the Brechtian epic theatre without a knowledge of the principles of the staging or a judicious adaptation of the staging to his own subject matter. Osborne knows enough about Brecht to both adopt and adapt his epic theatre.

During the late fifties and early sixties few in England probably possessed a thorough knowledge of Bertolt Brecht's dramatic aesthetics. The complete English translation of his non-dramatic theatrical writings was not published until 1964.³ Even Osborne states that "Brecht was little more than a name to me" when he wrote The Entertainer. However, Osborne's disavowal of knowledge about Brecht is probably overstated in order to discredit The Penguin Dictionary of the Theatre. The dictionary gives a rather negative criticism of The Entertainer's form; so Osborne's reply characteristically reverses

²Among the London productions of Brecht before the writing of the Osborne play, The Entertainer, there were three productions of the Berliner Ensemble (1956) of Mother Courage, The Caucasian Chalk Circle, and an adaptation of the Farquar play Recruiting Officer, Joan Littlewood's Mother Courage (1955), and Sam Wanamaker's Three Penny Opera (1956). See Martin Esslin's Reflections: Essays on Modern Theatre, Anchor Books (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1971), pp. 75-8.

³Bertolt Brecht, Brecht on Theatre, trans. by John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964).

the roles of critic and writer: "It is also full of know-all shots in the dark as when it says I drew 'unsuccessfully' on Brecht for 'The Entertainer'"⁴ It is certain that Osborne knew at least basic Brechtian tenets before he wrote the play since Osborne had performed in George Devine's London production of The Good Woman of Setzuan in the fall of 1956. Martin Esslin terms Osborne's performance "doubling a variety of bit parts [most notably the water-carrier]" one of the more memorable moments of the production.⁵

Brecht's essential dramatic tenets complement Osborne's ironic comic vision. Brecht's view of the world is also essentially comic.

[Epic theatre is] chiefly interested in the attitudes which people adopt towards one another, wherever they are socio-historically significant (typical). It works out scenes where people adopt attitudes of such a sort that the social laws under which they are acting spring into sight. . . . Human behaviour is shown as alterable; man himself as dependent on certain political and economic factors and at the same time capable of altering them.⁶

For Brecht, man forms his own destiny; his real enemy is society and himself. As in all comedy, Brecht's theatre presents man's relationship to man and to the way of the world. Man can overreach (only) his situation not himself; for Brecht insists that man is neither a fixed quantity nor is the environment a "coherent whole".⁷ This view of the environment liberates Osborne from the naturalistic vision

⁴"John Osborne on the thesis Business," p. 20.

⁵Esslin, Reflections, pp. 78-9.

⁶Brecht, Brecht on Theatre, p. 86.

⁷Ibid., p. 97.

which does present a coherent whole with man a fixed entity in it. Yet, this view of man in the world is not a novel one for Osborne since Look Back in Anger's naturalistic world is only a figment of Jimmy's mind. And even in Epitaph for George Dillon, Osborne does not present George as an entirely static mechanism; his final grudging acceptance and refusal to forgive the naturalistic world view at least suggests the possibility that man is neither "fixed" nor an inhuman "quantity" in the world.

Brecht's vision of the world is based on the Marxist concept of dialectical materialism which:

regards nothing as existing except in so far as it changes, in other words, is in disharmony with itself. This also goes for those human feelings, opinions and attitudes through which at any time the form of men's life together finds its expression.⁸

Attention is focused upon the dialectic between appearance and reality. For Brecht, the "essence of a thing is usually concealed by its appearance" so that the "appearance often appears more essential than essence."⁹ For example, in The Good Woman of Setzuan the essence of Shen Ta is cloaked in the appearance of her male evil cousin Shui Ta. In Hegalian terms, the thesis of Shen Ta is opposed by the antithesis of Shui Ta with the result a synthesis of the mutual contradiction. The play ends with Shen Ta's announcement to the gods that she is "Shui Ta and Shen Ta. Both."

⁸Ibid., p. 193.

⁹Manfred Wekwerth, "From Brecht Today," The Drama Review, 37 (Fall 1967): 119.

[because a] injunction
 To be good and yet to live
 Was a thunderbolt:
 It has torn me in two
 I can't tell how it was
 But to be good to others
 And myself at the same time
 I could not do it
 Your world is not an easy one, illustrious ones!¹⁰

This incongruity is the equivalent of the Osborne ironic contest ending in comic impasse. Jimmy Porter's stance or appearance of the hero or the naturalistic animal is of his own contrivance. He is neither fighting an inexorable fate nor an inimical mechanistic world but visions of himself that he cannot accept. Jimmy's essence in his society is a man who requires others to exist. Finally, he remains tragic in his spirit of defiant non-forgiveness but comic in his immersion into the social community where Fortune reigns, not Fate. Yet, the play ends with the synthesis of both appearance and essence as an unresolved, not unresolvable, conflict of life.

Osborne's societies, like Brecht's, are generally quite inimicable to real human ideals and values. Because of his Marxist viewpoint, Brecht's societies are most often plagued by the blight of capitalism. In The Good Woman of Setzuan Shen Te stresses the economic basis of life's incongruity:

When we extend our hand to a beggar, he tears it off for us
 When we help the lost, we are lost ourselves
 And so
 Since not to eat is to die

¹⁰Bertolt Brecht, The Good Woman of Setzuan, in Types of Drama: Plays and Essays, ed. by Sylvan Barnet, et. al. (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1972), X, 564. Subsequent references to the play will be in the text from this edition.

Who can long refuse to be bad?
 As I lay prostrate beneath the weight of good intentions
 Ruin stared me in the face
 It was when I was unjust that I ate good meat
 And hobnobbed with the mighty
 Why?

. . . .
 I became a wolf
 Find me guilty, then illustrious ones
 But know:
 All that I have done I did
 To help my neighbor
 To love my lover
 And to keep my little one from want
 For your great, godly deeds, I was too poor, too small
 (pp. 564-5).

Some critics stress Brecht's Marxist ideology as the primary reason for Osborne's espousal of the epic theatre--for such critics, they both seem to use the stage as a platform: "In Brecht, the English dramatist found a writer who combined commitment with poetry: . . . to be 'Brechtian', then, was to be politically concerned"¹¹ However, it should be noted that the England that Osborne presents is one that is already socialist. His societies are economically blighted because the material imperative still subordinates the morality and idealism of man. Both dramatists, like all good dramatists, are less interested in the society than in its effects upon people's attitudes and ways of living. Neither dramatist presents the effect of the society through direct preaching. Brecht often stresses that his Marxism, like Osborne's socialism, is an experimental answer, "an attitude

¹¹ Charles Marowitz, Tom Milne, Owen Hale, ed., The Encore Reader: A Chronicle of the New Drama (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1965), p. 135.

to truth."¹² "At rehearsals of his plays Brecht sometimes quoted his own Galileo: 'I'm not trying to show that I'm in the right, but to find out whether!'"¹³ The aim of the epic theatre is "less to moralize than to observe."¹⁴

However, Brecht did believe that his epic theatre should help his audience discover means for the elimination of the circumstances presented. Even though his plays usually end, like Osborne's, with the unforgiving immersion of his main characters into the still degenerated comic society, the audience response generated by the play should always trigger the type of questioning articulated in the Epilogue to The Good Woman:

You're thinking, aren't you, that this is no right
Conclusion to the play you've seen tonight?
After a tale, exotic, fabulous,
A nasty ending was slipped up on us.
We feel deflated too. We too are nettled
To see the curtain down and nothing settled.
How could a better ending be arranged?
Could one change people? Can the world be changed?
.....
There must, there must, there's got to be a way (p. 566)!

Consequently, there is a close affinity between both dramatists' approach to the audience. Both seek a feeling and thinking audience.

Brecht's ideal spectator will "criticize human behaviour from a social point of view" and will "make comparisons" about influences in human life. In order to do this, the audience must not empathize

¹² John Osborne, "They Call It Cricket," p. 65.

¹³ Quoted in Types of Drama: Plays and Essays, ed. by Sylvan Barnet, et. al. (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1972), p. 570.

¹⁴ Brecht, Brecht on Theatre, p. 75.

with the actor. This does not mean that there is no emotion in the epic theatre.

The rejection of empathy is not the result of a rejection of the emotions, nor does it lead to such. . . . The emotions always have a quite definite class basis; the form they take at any time is historical, restricted and limited in specific ways. The emotions are in no sense universally human and timeless.

Brecht's use of the emotions will then reinforce his comic vision. Emotional stimulation will lead to stimulation of the reason to find means of correcting the societal problems. The emotions are not merely stimulated without the concomitant stimulation of the reason; reason and the emotions are never separated in the epic theatre. "It is the orthodox theatre which sins by dividing reason and emotions, in that it virtually rules out the former." The problem of the Aristotelian theatre's use of emotion is that the emotion elicited is empathetic in nature. So, the spectator is lulled into a sense of inevitability or Fate.¹⁵

Brecht's theatre is "epic"--it does not take over epic material of certain heroes, passages, or scenes, but it does recreate in the theatre audience the attitudes of the epic narrator "who knows more than the story knows."¹⁶ The feelings that a Brechtian drama elicit are the same feelings of all drama--with the addition of a sense of evitability. When the reason examines the events and characters, it judges them a facet of the comic world's flux. "The epic theatre's spectator says: I'd never have thought it--That's not the way--That's

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 86, 145, 162.

¹⁶ Wekwerth, "From Brecht Today," p. 124.

extraordinary, hardly believable--It's got to stop--the sufferings of this man appall me, because they are unnecessary--That's great art: nothing obvious in it--I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh."¹⁷ The audience response in Look Back in Anger illustrates this ambivalence. The tragic Porter stance mocks the "untranscendent" human condition and imitates it through the need for Cliff and Alison. Jimmy's rantings and ravings produce our laughter insofar as they are ridiculous mirrors of an invalid world vision. Yet, they simultaneously produce tears when he must abandon his idealizations in a world which cannot encompass this "tragic" or elevated spirit. The contrapuntal nature of the Brechtian stage will allow Osborne's dramatic words to ironically blend "bursts of feeling" and the "irreverences of a comic burlesque which 'mocks and imitates at one and the same moment'."¹⁸

Brecht's epic theatre more than merely complements Osborne's subject matter; it also provides him with a new technique that is unrestricted by the time and space limitations of the naturalistic stage. Nevertheless, the intricate relationship between vision and technique in Brecht's theatre mirrors Osborne's artistic concerns that subject, form, and entertainment be united.

Brecht's rejection of mere stimulation of audience emotions is a function of his rejection of the prevailing style of German acting

¹⁷ Brecht, Brecht on Theatre, p. 71.

¹⁸ Martin Esslin, Brecht: A Choice of Evils (London, 1959), p. 222. Quoted in Styron, The Dark Comedy, p. 177.

which aimed to produce "the maximum impression of emotional intensity by indulgence in hysterical outbursts and paroxysms of uncontrolled roaring and inarticulate anguish." The German acting of Brecht's time were "orgies of vocal excess and apoplectic breast beating" that thwarted the thinking process of the audience.¹⁹ Osborne's dictum that he wants to make people feel, to give them lessons in feeling; they can think afterwards" reverses the emphasis of Brecht while producing the same audience response. Osborne's emphasis is a function of his environment. Osborne believes that "there seems little danger of people feeling too much--at least not in England" ²⁰ A set of emotional stock responses stimulates the English audience's critical faculty. They are more under-stimulated than non-thinking. The methods that Brecht uses to produce his thinking and feeling audience will obviously need to be adapted to Osborne's cool English audience. While Brecht eschews the stock response of empathetic excess that cripples thought, Osborne eschews the emotional dormancy that exalts inhumane criticisms. Osborne demands, with Brecht, that the critical faculty of man "speaks for people in their time."²¹

Brecht's concept of defamiliarization or alienation in staging is the logical extension of his comic vision. "Defamiliarization is a method which searches for ways of destroying the habitual way of

¹⁹ Esslin, Reflections, p. 77.

²⁰ "They Call It Cricket," p. 47.

²¹ "A Word from John Osborne," p. 30.

looking at a thing, in order to reveal the contradictions within it, so that its reality may be perceived." Because this method "lets the essence of a thing shine through its appearance at every moment,"²² the reason can function to clarify the emotions that are not of "sub-conscious origins" and as a result "carry nobody away." To achieve the alienation, the epic theatre does not reflect or represent the "natural" disorder of things as the naturalistic stage does. Instead, the epic stage presents.

Representations must take second place to what is represented, men's life together in society: and the pleasure felt in their perfection must be converted into the higher pleasure felt when the rules emerging from this life in society are treated as imperfect and provisional. In this way the theatre leaves its spectators productively disposed even after the spectacle is over.

The A-effect is therefore a technique of "taking the human social incidents to be portrayed and labelling them as something striking, something that calls for explanation," something "not to be taken for granted, not just natural."²³ This presentation of human events will emphasize the comic,--showing man as his own destiny.

Non-aristotelian drama would at all costs avoid bundling together the events portrayed and presenting them as an inexorable fate, to which the human being is handed over helpless despite the beauty and significance of his reactions; . . . it is precisely this fate that it would study closely, showing it up as of human contriving.²⁴

The incidents chosen for the epic theatre are usually quite ordinary because these events provide the most numerous instances of the

²²Wekwerth, "From Brecht Today," p. 119.

²³Brecht, Brecht on Theatre, pp. 88, 205, 125.

²⁴Ibid., p. 87.

dialectical comic world. Also, they can most easily facilitate alienation. "Characters and incidents from ordinary life, from our immediate surroundings, being familiar, strike us as more or less natural. Alienating them helps to make them seem remarkable to us."

For instance, a simple way of alienating something is that normally applied to customs and moral principles. A visit, the treatment of an enemy, a lovers' meeting, agreements about politics or business, can be portrayed as if they were simply illustrations of general principles valid for the place in question. . . . As soon as we ask whether in fact it should have become such, or what about it should have done so, we are alienating the incident.²⁵

In the presentation each episode is distinct to create a "chance to interpose our judgment." This episodic nature of the theatre is another indication of its "epic" quality. The distinctive nature of the episodes is emphasized by "giving each its own structure as a play within a play."²⁶

The method of presenting the incidents to achieve the A-effect is essentially aimed at exposing the artifice of the theatre. The presentation purges the theatre of everything that is "magical." Every element mutually alienates. The acting in the episodes must undermine mere empathetic response; so, "the gestic principles takes over. . . . from the principle of imitation."²⁷ The audience must know that the actor is the actor and not character. The actor must present "present-day events and modes of behaviour with the same de-

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 140, 201.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 201.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 136, 204, 86.

tachment as the historian adopts. . . . He must alienate these characters and incidents from us." However, the concept of the gestic, or demonstration, and the empathetic are really fused by the actor so that the alienation produced in the audience is not subconscious passive empathy.

In reality it is a matter of two mutually hostile processes which fuse in the actor's work; his performance is not just composed of a bit of the one and a bit of the other. His particular effectiveness comes from the tussle and tension of the two opposites, and also from their depth.²⁸

Since the traditional theatre emphasizes the imitative principle, Brecht's devices of defamiliarization focus on the achievement of the gestic. It does not lose sight of the imitative. The actor often directly addresses the audience to remove the illusion of the naturalistic stage. He also often combines gestures with music to "exhibit certain basic gestures on the stage." The music is usually derived from the "'cheap' music" of the cabaret and operetta. This music has other alienation functions in the epic theatre. For Brecht believes that music has a wide public acceptance; it can thereby function as ordinary events in facilitating the reversal from familiarity to meditated alienation. In the epic theatre, music functions with no narcotic effect or unproductive "demoralizing social function." Instead, it is actually a "muck-raker, an informer, a nark." The music achieves its reflective and moral nature in the epic theatre by its strict separation from the other elements of entertainment offered. The illusion breaking is achieved by rough incorporation of

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 140, 277-8.

the music in the drama: songs are sung by the actors who have changed positions to sing; the lighting is different; the orchestra is visible; song titles and musical emblems are projected on screens; a chorus is visible. Along with the sung music, the choreography presents "elegant movement and graceful grouping" which not only can alienate by its presentation of the more natural order but can help the story with "inventive miming."²⁹

The stage setting of all this artifice "no longer has to give the illusion of a room or a locality. . . . It is enough for [the set designer] to give hints, though these must make statements of greater historical or social interest than does the real setting."³⁰ Most of these facets of Brecht's stagecraft were well-known in England even before his philosophy was understood since language is really not a functioning barrier to their use.³¹

Brecht finally stresses that his theatre is characterized by a naivety which imbues it with "imagination, humour, and meaning."³² The enjoyment principle in the epic theatre is an important factor in Osborne's adoption of it; Osborne distinctly avoids theatre with purely intellectual functions. The principle of naivety also demands that Brecht approach each ~~drama~~ *drama* freshly--as a child would. Therefore, each

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 85-9, 204.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 203-4.

³¹ Esslin, Reflections, pp. 75-6.

³² Brecht, Brecht on Theatre, p. 248.

production seeks the exact theatrical expression of the subject matter. Brechtian theatre is not static in the application of the same alienation devices to each production. Any theatrical device, in any combination, which produces both the subject matter's comic dialectical essence and the audience response of emotions, reason, and enjoyment is essentially Brechtian. And Osborne applies the experimental, naive approach to his use of Brecht.

Two of Osborne's plays, The Entertainer and The World of Paul Slickey,³³ use Brecht's musical theatrics. Even though both plays present Osborne's ironic comic contest, they differ in Osborne's application of Brecht's alienation effect. Osborne's adaptation of the A-effect is dependent upon the audience stock response to the two musical frameworks in the plays. In The Entertainer, music is only used when Archie Rice is performing in the music hall. The other action of the play is set in the Rice residence. Therefore, the use of the music in this play is essentially realistic. (Even though the Penguin Dictionary of the Theatre terms it "Brecht-inspired, [and] non-realistic.")³⁴ Osborne uses the representational or realistic music framework in The Entertainer because "Its contact is immediate, vital, and direct." For Osborne's English audience this type of direct stimulation is needed to convert the stock response of English detachment to an alienation closer to Brecht's. Yet, the music hall framework

³³ John Osborne, The Entertainer (New York: Criterion Books, 1958), and The World of Paul Slickey in Plays for England, I. The Blood of the Bambergers, II. Under Plain Cover and The World of Paul Slickey, Evergreen Black Cat Edition (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1959). Subsequent references will be given in the text.

³⁴ P. 208.

also allows thought with the emotional response. The natural artifice of the music hall prevents total or unconscious empathy: "this technique [has] its own traditions, its own convention and symbol, its own mystique." Osborne believes the music hall is a folk art which can not only affect everyone in the audience (it is "something that once belonged to everyone") but can, at the same time, naturally effect an alienation response because of the stylized techniques used (The Entertainer, "Introductory Note"). Like any folk art, the music hall is, according to Brecht, "a mixture of earthy humour, sentimentality, homespun morality and cheap sex." The acting in this art form is already designed to eliminate empathy: "to act in them [folk plays] all that is needed is a capacity for speaking unnaturally and a smoothly conceited manner on the stage. A good helping of superficial slickness is enough."³⁵ The music hall format in The Entertainer creates simultaneous intellectual and emotional response without the use of Brecht's A-effect because defamiliarization is already central to the music hall. However, through Brecht's influence Osborne uses the music hall in alternation with the Rice residence to solve the problems of time and space in the play. The presence of the music hall trap-pings in the Rice residence also functions as an A-effect. Osborne is selective in his adaptation of Brecht. The complimentary nature of the two dramatist's concepts requires no other solely Brechtian technique than the use of the music and the alternating setting creating a somewhat episodic structure.

³⁵ Brecht, p. 153.

Osborne's use of the alienation effect is more pervasive in The World of Paul Slickey because the musical framework of the play is the English musical comedy. This basically light-hearted entertainment normally elicits the smile of detachment. The audience responds neither with real emotions nor real thought. Of course, this indifferent response is antithetical to both Brecht and Osborne. So, Osborne's task in The World of Paul Slickey is to stimulate the audience to a response by defamiliarizing all the elements of the average musical comedy which create the somnolent response in the audience.

The essential characteristic of all the techniques of the musical comedy is smooth presentation. Songs, dance routines, plot are all presented without needless attention to the artifice. When a character sings, he does so without breaking character or the mood. The songs are most often central to the plot and, therefore, do not contain lyrics which are too complex. Dances "convey some part of the show's argument."³⁶ The plot is simple, easily understood, and well-made. The characters are vital (and, therefore, comic) but rarely true individuals. They are only distinctive as types. However, since Osborne's audience requires some emotional stimulation before they can even think, his alienation effect in this play couples the alienating of the technical elements (music, dance, plot) with unexpected subject matter for musical comedy. Osborne constantly debunks the usual musical comedy attitudes in The World of Paul Slickey because the smile of detachment is elicited by the smooth presenta-

³⁶Observer, 10 May 1959.

tional techniques of the musical comedy as well as by the soothing view of society. The English musical comedies "succour and flatter a bewildered, disinherited middle-class audience bawling after a decadent and dummy tradition."³⁷ Consequently, Osborne's alienation effect satirizes these attitudes to bring the audience to awareness through their feelings. He also defamiliarizes the musical comedy by broadening its scope to include all classes of the society, thereby increasing the satiric targets. The alienation of the subject matter creates "images that move people" and gives them "a vision they don't otherwise get" in the musical comedy.³⁸ The satire does not aim to present a program of reform; its aim is enlightenment. Osborne's dedication in The World of Paul Slickey states his targets and implies his alienation technique:

I dedicate this play to the liars and self-deceivers; . . . In this bleak time when such men have never had it so good, this entertainment is dedicated to their boredom, their incomprehension, their distaste. It would be a sad error to raise a smile for them.

Osborne's use of Brechtian techniques in The World of Paul Slickey was not successful in channeling the audience response to real thought and feeling: the play was Osborne's first failure in four plays. However, the failure was not in Osborne's artistry but in the audience's stock response. This response ignores both Osborne's warning in the dedication and David Pelham's audience hand-out. Pelham, the producer of the play, cautions the audience against

³⁷ John Osborne, "John Osborne on the thesis Business," p. 20.

³⁸ John Osborne, "John Osborne, The Observer Profile."

the usual expectation for the musical comedy: "We're not doing Blossom Time or The Student Prince! We're doing a musical about 1959 for audiences of 1959" ³⁹ The critical viewpoint stood pat in its vision of the play as a musical comedy written by a very angry young man. Critics expecting trenchant anger and social solutions complain that the social criticism is "too sketchy and shaky for it to make a direct hit." ⁴⁰ This same line of criticism also finds too many targets in the play: "Determined to have a crack at everybody and everything, he spreads his bullets wildly." ⁴¹ Ironically, this very chaos in the play is deliberate, a part of the rejection of the normal tempered atmosphere of a musical comedy. Finally, much of the critical disenchantment with the play is based upon Osborne's failure to write an average musical comedy (which is, of course, what he does not want to do!): Osborne "has only to regard his new effort simply as a lesson in How Not to Write a Musical Comedy." ⁴² All of these points of criticism use a frame of reference outside Osborne's and Brecht's theatre, and they ultimately account for the play's commercial failure. The anger produced by the play was deflected from what was presented, the subject matter of the play, to Osborne himself--he was personally booed at the stage door of the London Palace after the

³⁹ Quoted in Carter, John Osborne, p. 112.

⁴⁰ Richard Findlater, "The Case of P. Slickey," The Twentieth Century 167 (January 1960): 34.

⁴¹ Quoted in The New York Times, 8 May 1959, from The Daily Express.

⁴² Observer, 10 May 1959.

final curtain.⁴³

Brecht's musical theatrics are only a technique for presenting Osborne's ironic comedies. The essential comic confrontation in both plays is strikingly similar. Both Archie Rice and Paul Slickey seek elevation in the world of the plays by claiming an inertia of the spirit. In the material world, for both of them, morals and feeling are mere nuisances and even hindrances. The material imperative for success requires a singleness of purpose which the morals and the emotions would diffuse. Their roles in the society, the bawdy entertainer and the critic, require this posture of transcendence. The spiritual inertia which marks this transcendence also permits survival beyond material success in the valueless, flexible society. (Although Paul Slickey is a well-heeled critic, Archie Rice is only a down-at-the-heels entertainer.) The inert spirit does not have to cope with uncertainty, irony, and emptiness in the society; its response is always the same. Archie Rice and Paul Slickey exhibit another Osborne posture of despair; they both deny the emotions and spirit and extol their physical freedom in a world fettered by petty moral and emotional alliances. The movement or plot of both plays brings both characters to an awareness of their real untranscendent natures. Archie finally leaves the world of entertainment which mirrored his transcendent self-image of the spiritually dead but vital wastrel. He is then immersed in the common, comic, world of petty

⁴³ Charles Hussey, "Osborne Looks Forward in Anger," New York Times Magazine, 25 October 1964, sec. 6, p. 76.

finances and sloppy, ineffectual emotions and mores. His spiritual inertia is real, not a pose. Jack Oakham, alias Paul Slickey, also believes that his inertia of the spirit is only a pose that does not mirror his interior. Unlike Archie Rice, Paul does not claim spiritual inertia once he leaves his public office at the newspaper. Instead, he claims idealism, spiritual vitality. The action of The World of Paul Slickey leads Paul to an acceptance of his real emptiness. Even though he finally leaves his public position of transcendence, the taint of the world remains with him. Both Osborne heroes end immersed in the comic world, without forgiving the loss of their ideal.

The action of The Entertainer takes place in a large English coastal resort; there are two settings within the town: the music hall and the Rice residence. However, the music hall never really leaves the stage. The technical artifice of the music hall is present even during the domestic scenes.

At the back a gauze. Behind it part of the town. . . . Knee-high flats and a door frame will serve for a wall. . . . Different swags can be lowered for various scenes to break up the acting areas. Also, ordinary, tatty backcloth and draw tabs. . . . The lighting is the kind you expect to see in the local Empire--everything bang-on, bright and hard, or a simple follow-spot. The scenes and interludes must, in fact, be lit as if they were simply turns on the bill. Furniture and props are as basic as they would be for a short sketch. On both sides of the proscenium is a square in which numbers--the turn numbers--appear. . . . Music. The latest, the loudest, the worst. A gauzed front-cloth. On it are painted enormous naked young ladies, waving brightly colored fans and kicking out gaily (pp. 11-12).

The omnipresence of the music hall effects a defamiliarization of the domestic scenes which functions as the typical Brechtian A-effect.

The ordinary domesticity within the aura of the music hall presents the essence behind the appearance. The scenes present the artifice or postures of comic conformity in England of the 1950's: the strategies that man must devise and believe in order to survive in the comic community, "the texture of ordinary despair."⁴⁴ The town behind the back gauze is the only other constant image in the play. The omnipresence of both town and the music hall (which Osborne believes is an important part of England) indicates the importance of the society or the world upon the characters' reactions.

Number One presents Archie's father, Billy, and daughter, Jean. However, before either are really introduced, Billy is surrounded by the noise of a common fight in the building: "a woman trying to separate two men--her son and her lover." Even though "the noise is muffled" after he politely requests quiet, the "sobbing is still audible" during the beginning of the scene. Osborne, thus, establishes the essence of this environment before Billy Rice is introduced as the quintessence of Edwardian England. His meticulous and dignified appearance, manners, and diction contrast sharply to the atmosphere created by his neighbors' fight. The contrast is sharpened as he begins to sing "Rock of Ages cleft for me/Let me hide myself in thee!" This music is in absurd contrast to the music played throughout the drama; its sentiment is quite the opposite of the atmosphere created by the domestic quarrel (p. 13).

During the scene with his granddaughter, the seventy-year old

⁴⁴ John Osborne, "They Call It Cricket," p. 51.

Billy Rice illustrates that "the only way he [can] deal with life [is] continually to draw on the strength of his remembered past."⁴⁵ Osborne is not merely presenting the classic comic pattern in which the old cannot cope because of the world's unfamiliarity; instead, Billy Rice is shown as coping with the world's uncertainty by juxtaposing it with the past's security and pride in the nation and "individual skills and craftsmanship."⁴⁶ He is not senile; and his lucidity requires a conscious strategy of survival. Billy Rice recognizes the inefficacy of Edwardian values in the 1950's; he is not willing an ideal as Jimmy Porter does. The aura of the music hall defamiliarizes a vision of Billy as the senile old man who lives in the past. Billy is the lucid old man who can only live in the present by remembering the past. The artifice of the music hall which is always present focuses attention of the conscious artifice of his response to life. His ability to affect such a role is part of his past experience as entertainer.

Number One analyzes Billy's response. Although twenty-two year old Jean is present on the stage, she is little more than a listening post. This "dullness" is realistically accounted for because Jean has returned home after a tiresome train trip. When Billy appears on stage the incongruity between his surroundings and his Edwardian bearing is heightened by his cheerful singing of the hymn. When a

⁴⁵ John Osborne, "A Word from John Osborne," p. 7.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

yell from downstairs becomes more audible, his reaction is a conscious articulation of the Edwardian ethnic prejudice: Billy "speaks, gravely, with forethought. . . . Bloody Poles and Irish!" This posture is followed by a more natural and spontaneous "I hate the bastards." His reaction to the sound of Jean's doorbell is a contrapuntal study of his knowledge of the world and the Edwardian vision that he affects. "He sings cheerfully, as if to drown the noise of the doorbell." This stratagem continues until he finally gives free reign to his irritation since the singing will not drown out the world: "Why don't they answer the bloody door!". When he believes that he will have to answer the door, he settles into his Edwardian role: he sees the other inhabitants of the building as uncultured animals who were probably born in fields. However, when the knocking continues and then intrudes upon his gentlemanly leisure period of newspaper, slippers and beer--he again becomes peevish. "Can't get any peace in this damned house. . . . Can't even read the paper in peace (pp. 13-15)." This little stage business of answering the door is a paradigm of his reaction to the world: comic acceptance of his occasional need of Edwardian rituals.

Billy's reaction to the world outside his immediate family depends on the Edwardian value system. The Rice house is a "mad-house" because the Edwardian dictum of racial separation has been ignored: "You know who she's [Phoebe, Archie's wife] got upstairs, in Mick's [Archie's son] old room, don't you? Some black fellow." Yet, his reaction to his personal world is less rigid. He accepts Phoebe's ac-

tions towards himself because she is in control of his physical survival: "Still, if she stays in she only gets irritable. And I can't stand rows. . . . No use arguing with Phoebe anyway. . . . She just won't listen to you" (p. 16). His discussion with Jean about the worlds of politics and entertainment also illustrates his lucid acceptance of the conditions he lives in. His look at the world situation is sandwiched between discussion of pubs--places of escape.

What about the news, eh? That's depressing. What d'you make of all this business out in the Middle East? People seem to be able to do what they like to us. Just what they like. I don't understand it. I really don't (p. 17).

[The music hall] is dead already. Has been for years. It was all over, finished, dead when I got out of it. I saw it coming. I saw it coming, and I got out. They don't want real people anymore (p. 18).

However, his awareness causes a depression which is actually life-negating. He no longer goes to one of the last bastions of Edwardianism, his Club, because he does not feel like it. Yet, it was his escape from his personal reality. The first scene ends with Billy making the grand gesture of proffering money to Jean for her train fare. The gesture is not really successful since he does not have the entire sum. But he still makes the gesture to protest the present English socialist state: "No use leaving it to the Government for them to hand out to a lot of bleeders who haven't got the gumption to do anything for themselves" (p. 21). Although Billy realizes that the outside world cannot really function under the Edwardian value system, he can still criticize it. And even though his personal world is dependent upon others, in any situation that he can control--he controls

it with the only certainty he knows. The mere fact that he has a vision of the past makes him cheerful amidst his depression: "I feel sorry for you people. You don't know what it's really like. You haven't lived, most of you. You've never known what it was like, you're all miserable really. You don't know what life can be like" (p. 23). The alienation effect finally reverses the usual stock response to an old man "living" in the past; he is better equipped to cope with reality than the others in the play.

Number Two presents Archie Rice, the Entertainer, in the music hall. Billy Rice's exposition about Archie in Number One causes an initial ambivalent audience reaction to him. Billy tells Jean that Archie was educated in the same school as Billy and his brother William who is a prominent and rich barrister. Billy believes that Archie is a failure working in a dead institution full of "a lot of third-class sluts standing about in the nude" (p. 18). So, when Archie goes through his jokes-song-dance routine the audience expects to react to the clown and jokester with the detachment of laughter; but, they simultaneously hope that there is more to Archie Rice than his artificial character. The search for the man behind the artifice is essentially an alienation response to the clown. The audience may wish to react on other levels, but in this scene it can only react to Archie Rice, song and dance jokester. However, Osborne has written Archie's speeches with the "exact phrasing" and "minute observation of tone and accent" of the dying music halls.⁴⁷ Consequently, he is

⁴⁷ Ian Scott-Kilvert, "The Hero in Search of a Dramatist. The Plays of John Osborne," Encounter 9 (December 1957): 29.

aware that the jokes of this music hall are not "the kind that first-night audiences like to laugh at" ⁴⁸ The audience reacts to Archie (and not his jokes) in Number Two with intellectual detachment. Because this is the beginning of Archie's routine he makes little effort to really make contact with the audience. This first part is his routines' most "set" section; he is in complete control of audience and the show dancing girls.

The intellectual detachment of Number Two results in a focus upon Archie's words. This scene presents Archie's transcendent response to life in the words of a "little song" that he claims he wrote himself.

"Why should I care?
 Why should I let it touch me!
 Why shouldn't I, sit down and try
 To let it pass over me?
 Why should they stare,
 Why should I let it get me?
 What's the use of despair,
 If they call you a square?
 If they see that you're blue, they'll--
 look down on you
 So why should I bother to care? (Thank
 God I'm normal!)
 So why should I bother to care (pp. 24-5)?"

The song seems merely to be a plea for acceptance--he does not want to be looked down upon. Yet, both the audience's initial concern for Archie and Jean and Billy's love for Archie indicate that it is "normal" to care. Emotional inertia will place Archie in a position of "superiority", in a sense. This emotional inertia isolates man in egomania (notice the repetition of "I"). There is no immersion in

⁴⁸ John Osborne, "Introduction," International Theatre Annual, No. 2, ed. Harold Hobson (London: John Calder, 1957), p. 10.

the comic community but elevation above it. Yet, at this point in the play the audience does not really know where art ends, and truth begins--in Archie's mind.

Number Three verifies the inaccuracy of Archie's view of normal men. The way Billy, Jean, and Phoebe discuss Archie and Mick and Frank, another son, indicates that they do indeed care. However, the scene also presents another characteristic of the people in the household. Their survival in their comic world requires strategies of deafness. No one in the house listens to the other. They seem to avoid direct confrontation of the others' strategies of survival. Phoebe is a hard-working and kind woman whose very existence depends upon her ability to avoid confronting reality--although she does know what it is. She drinks too much (with the decided disapproval of Billy who knows "better than to overdo it"), attends any movie because she "can't sit for long" and would "rather have a spot of pictures", and flits from one subject to another to avoid confronting the essence behind appearance:

Archie worries about him [Mick]. He doesn't say so, but I know he does. It's funny really because they never seemed to hit it off so well, in lots of ways. Not like you and him, or Frank. He's a very sensible boy, young Mick. He's very straight. I've lost some sleep this week, I can tell you (pp. 26-30).

Phoebe's domain is physical survival and comic flexibility. Her concerns for her children seem to focus solely on the body functions:

[Jean] looks a bit peaky. Round the face, . . . I don't suppose she's eating properly.

I don't know why they send these boys out to do the fighting. .

. . . I wonder whether Mick isn't better off [than Frank] after all. I mean--they do look after them, don't they?

A boy like [Frank] shouldn't be doing it. Hospital porter. D'you know they made him stoke the boilers (pp. 31-1)?

But the focus on the music hall artifice alienates the audience from the stock response to Phoebe as a empty-headed drunkard. The drinking pushes the reality that she sees further back--but never entirely out of focus. When Jean recounts Frank's imprisonment for refusal to serve in the armed forces, she also begins to examine Phoebe's feelings about Frank and Billy's measuring "up young Mick against Frank." Phoebe's reaction to this deeper look into the family's relationship is a definite: "Well, we'll shut up about it now" (p. 30). She consciously guards her vision of reality--that she knows is merely appearance.

Jean returns home to "think" after an awareness of the aura of dissociation in the world. She and her fiancé have argued over her involvement in a rally in Trafalgar Square and her art classes at a Club for teenage gang members. Both activities confirmed her vitality: "somehow--with a whole lot of other people, strange as it may seem--I managed to get myself steamed up about the way things were going." Her fiancé's objection to her actions surprises her:

I hadn't realized--it just hadn't occurred to me that you could love somebody, that you could want them, and want them twenty-four hours of the day and then suddenly find that you're neither of you even living in the same world. I don't understand that (pp. 28-9).

Jean seems to be less concerned with the physical survival that Phoebe stresses than with the spirit. She can see the disparity between the world that Phoebe believes will protect Mick, who is in the army, and

Frank and the world that really exists. Jean sees that this world which at least is interested in the material well-being of man cannot assuage the spiritual emptiness: "They're all looking after us. We're all right, all of us. Nothing to worry about. We're all right. God save the Queen" (p. 31)! It almost seems that Jean could exist without a survival strategy. But, her running home from her fiancé, her inattentiveness to Billy in Number One and her admission that she "started drinking gin on the train" (p. 30) indicates her immersion in this world of emotions and uncertainties. The alienation effect of the scene unites the three generations when their usual juxtaposition in a drama presents friction. They are further ironically united by the atmosphere of disassociation because each person orders the world with different poses. The critic who complains that Jean doesn't "state the case for youth" and that the "members of Archie's family incessantly harange each other [but] seldom make a human connection"⁴⁹ is basing his evaluation upon the familiar expectations of the realistic play.

Numbers Three and Four are contrapuntal. The immersion of Billy, Jean, and Phoebe into a world requiring a conscious dimming of reality is the antithesis of Archie's music hall presentation. The performance emphasizes Archie's eccentricity; he exists outside the circle of common men. His statement the "I don't want to see you suffering" sharply contrasts with unselfish concern for fellow family

⁴⁹ Kenneth Tynan, Curtains. Selections from the Drama Criticism and Related Writings, p. 173.

members exhibited in the previous number. His song reiterates the selfish egotism that keynotes Number Two: "We're all out for good old Number one,/Number one's the only one for me!" The song also presents the essential concern of all Osborne heroes--"But I don't want no drab equality." The lyrics link Archie's transcendent stance to the English society's socialist state where the material overpowers any values.

[England] Don't let your feeling roam,
 But remember that charity begins at home.
 For Britons shall be free!
 The National Health won't bring you wealth
 Those wigs and blooming spectacles are brought by you and me.
 The Army, the Navy and the Air Force,
 Are all we need to make the blighters see
 It still belongs to you, the old red, white and blue
Drop Union Jack
 Those bits of red still on the map
 We won't give up without a scrap.
 What we've got left back
 We'll keep and blow you, Jack (pp. 32-3)!

The song suggests national pride as a solution to selfishness because it would add some value to life. However, the "number one" stanza encircles the "England" section of the song. Men are too selfish to even consider their country; the solution is not a present reality. Although Archie seems to be immersing himself in the selfish world, the final stanza effects a separation when he bids God to bless England (or the audience) and he remains outside the circle.

Osborne insists that Archie's jokes throughout the play are "part of the pro's language, . . . consistant [sic] favourites with music hall[not West End] audiences, and do not have any necessary

reference to individual sexual normality."⁵⁰ However, the order in which Archie tells the jokes describes his eccentric type of transcendence. The jokes successively debunk the values or mores of the society until Archie transcends in a morass of spiritual inertia. The routine first attacks the Edwardian patriotism which the song posits as a solution to the national drive toward the material: "I've played in front of them all! 'The Queen', 'The Duke of Edinburgh', 'The Prince of Wales', and the--what's the name of that other pub?" The other jokes attach the sexual prejudices of the time. Archie deprecates, with the same apparent perplexity as the public, the types of songs the crooners sing; he proclaims himself the "dirty old man" who has a "marvellous [sic] time up here with all these posing girls" despite his age; he then implies a homosexual proclivity only to end with a complete rejection of the sexual sphere of life: "I'd rather have a glass of beer any day!" His introduction to the song is "'The Old Church Bell won't ring tonight, as the Verger's dropped a clanger'" (p. 31)! The audience's final image of the entertainer in Number Four is of an egocentric man who flaunts the mores and demurs the common vices of the material imperative. Osborne believes that such behaviour is caused by the society: "People who are conditioned to insecurity rarely try to live according to the mores of those who are not."⁵¹ Obviously, Archie Rice is even above the contemporary

⁵⁰ John Osborne, "A Word from John Osborne," p. 30.

⁵¹ Ibid.

ambition; for he rigidly spends his life in an institution that was "dead" when he entered it, although he uses the devices of the society's "credit" to remain in it. Archie's transcendence or elevation is that he is perpetually out of step with the society; this is the only vital role for him. But the consistency of his insecurity and his resistance to the values of the society ironically provide a fixed vision of life. Also, the "I" that is all important to Archie does not even have the ambitious spirit that is the only ideal in contemporary England. Archie's "I" is animal matter only; beer and sex are his life's goals. He is spiritually empty.

The audience reaction to Number Four is crucial because Archie goes home in Numbers Five and Six where he is immersed in the society. J. L. Styan states that because the "last ugly stages of the senility of the English music hall" is "a devastating symbol for England in the 1950s" we "resent our own laughter [at Archie's jokes], and even each other, as we laugh."⁵² It is certainly true that the ever present images of music hall and town allude to an intertwining, possibly symbolic relationship. This relationship is important since the ironic comedy requires a sense of the actuality or comic society. However, the focus of the play upon Archie, necessitates a reaction to him primarily and not the contemporary problem. Osborne does not really expect his essentially non-music hall audience to laugh at the jokes--but he does expect them to react to the entertainer. The music hall is only really "vital" because it causes entertainer and

⁵²Styan, The Dark Comedy, p. 256.

entertained to come in direct contact. The intellectual delineations begun in the first music hall scene continue in this one. The audience can clearly focus upon the self-image Archie presents. And the audience must also be aware of certain incongruities. Archie's image of the rest of humanity's selfishness is not only exaggerated but largely erroneous. Archie's self image of spiritual deadness in a sexual, beer-drinking husk is presented through the artifice of the music hall. Although his self-deprecation includes his abilities as an entertainer ("Blimey, that went better first house."), the staging, recitation, singing, and dancing at least imply spirit. There is, of course, the central dilemma of Brecht's and Osborne's theatrics: where is the man, where is the artifice. The intellectual alienation of the audience causes them to question whether the image of Archie is appearance or reality. The incongruities point to mere appearance--part of the "pro's" bag of tricks. However, if this image is the "real" Archie then the audience can recognize its final illusiveness.

Number Four also elicits emotional response. Archie's routine in this scene is definitely more audience-conscious. This vital relationship is illustrated by the number of pauses, direct addresses ("you"), and gestures toward them. The result of this consciousness is a less haughty and manipulative (thus alienating) master of ceremonies and a more eager-to-please entertainer. The song itself indicates the awareness of audience because it begins with the concept of "we" before effecting Archie's elevation. The more direct the contact with Archie (this intensifies throughout the play) the more the

audience reacts to the performance--not because it improves but because Archie becomes more human and intertwined with them. In Number Four, the emotional response is minimal--but present. It is rather overshadowed by the incongruities inherent in Archie's performance. A response to incongruity is largely intellectual. Yet, as the play progresses the audience's emotions are definitely engaged. A member of the first night audience reported to The New Statesman how this emotional response was elicited:

"I am still not sure how we were induced to play the part written for us--to emit that deadly sound of luke-warm laughter, willing but uncertain which gave the cue for Archie's ironic impromptu about bringing the roof down and gave point to the venom behind his surface heartiness. Pretty flat it would all have fallen if we had been bringing the roof down, wouldn't it? . . . Maybe John Osborne knew just how much corn and bawdy he could include and be sure that the guffaws of the randy and distaste of the squeamish would both be tempered and confused by reverence for the leading player."⁵³

The rest of the play resolves the incongruities of Archie's image. First Archie's music hall image is presented as equivalent to Archie's self-image outside the music hall. Then, Archie's self-image is proven illusory when his son, Mick, is killed by the Cyprian rebels, and the income tax man comes. Finally Archie falls in step with society, however reluctantly. In Numbers Five and Six Archie brings his entertainer image into the Rice home. But while the presence of the music hall in the residence scenes points to the family's conscious strategies for coping with reality, Archie's consistent entertainer stance presents willed rejection of reality. The members of the

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E. Morgan, quoted in Styan, p. 256.

family can separate appearance and reality. Archie's appearance is his reality. The family illustrates the comic spirit that accepts actuality and merely seeks ways to temper the pain of defeat. Archie rigidly wills his ideal of singularity; his individuality is his elevation.

In Numbers Five and Six the family compromises with life, as Archie inflexibly remains the entertainer that is all exterior--a husk. His actions always reinforce his "personal myth"--elevation through his spiritual depravity and physical excess. Osborne states that Archie's manner of speech even affects the spiritual emptiness:

What ever he says to anyone is almost always very carefully "thrown away". Apparently absent minded, it is a comedian's technique, it absolves him seeming committed to anyone or anything (p. 34).

Throughout the two numbers Archie establishes himself at the expense of the others. Although Archie "admires" his father "deeply" his role as the entertainer causes him to seem distant and patronizing. He constantly focuses upon Bill's age, schooling, religion while deprecating his great pride in his career: Billy "sounds like a toast-master with DTs. . . . He's quite well-read for an ignorant old pro. . . . [James Agate said] that you [Billy] and Mrs. Pat Campbell were his favourite female impersonators." Upon the last insult (which all emphasize Billy's Edwardian values) Archie chooses other targets. Osborne stresses the concept of Archie's artifice in the stage directions; for Archie, like Jimmy Porter and George Dillon, is quite aware of the danger of going too far: "Archie knows by long experience how far he can go and manages gently to turn the situa-

tion" (pp. 36-7).

After establishing his transcendence in the society with a celebration of the twentieth anniversary of not paying income tax, he launches an attack upon Jean. Osborne indicates that his "patronage of his daughter Jean is more wary, sly, unsure [because he] suspects her intelligence, aware that she may be stronger than the rest of them" (p. 34). However, he attacks all the same--striking out specifically at her relationship with Graham ("a bit suburban") and her political involvement: ("Are you one of those who don't like the Prime Minister? I think I've grown rather fond of him. I think it was after he went to the West Indies to get Noel Coward to write a play for him" [p. 39]). Yet, his uncertainty about Jean's reaction results in his statement that he is "a wee bit slewed" like everyone else. The guise of drunkenness is not only part of his self-image but also allows him to run through his routine of deprecation without really hurting anyone since they are drunk too. Archie's willed elevation is achieved by an artifice that will only work under certain conditions. Archie himself says that "Observation--is the basis of all Art" (p. 41)--when Jean questions his actions. And as he separates reality (observation) and artifice he begins to destroy his depraved elevation. At the end of Number Six Archie informs Jean that Mick has been taken prisoner--he has committed himself to keep the news from the family. Despite what he says--Archie is not only out for himself--number one. When Jean hears the news she can only seek the dulling powers of alcohol; Archie takes refuge in his image. But the sheer energy needed for the telling of "the greatest compliment I had

paid to me--the greatest compliment I always treasure" is too much. When the artifice of transcendence is stripped away, only the old man with the need for society remains: "Talk to me" (p. 42).

Number Six begins (after the intermission) with a domestic scene without Archie. The scene again stresses the compromise of the family that allows them to adjust to life. The energy of adjustment is less than the energy of elevation. Phoebe's view of the necessity for compromise is that "it's just being sensible" (p. 45). She has accepted Archie's many affairs with women, his daughter, Jean, as her own, and a life verging on poverty. However, she is still a person who retains her humanity. She is not phlegmatic when it comes to asserting her personal dignity. She will not let Jean order her around; she still hopes for the future, she tries. She only accepts when struggle would be fruitless. And ultimately she is a good, self-sacrificing woman; she is the kind of woman who will never succeed in contemporary England. With this comic position she is lucid in her assessment of Archie: "He hasn't got any enemy in the world who's done him the harm he's done himself" (p. 46). The lucidity often causes her drinking. (In Number Seven the drinking is intensified by her deep concern for Mick.) Archie arrives with his other son Frank "prepared to be gay" (p. 53). Frank is Archie's "'feed' because this seems to be a warm, reasonable relationship substitute that suits them both" (p. 51). Frank compromises; Archie transcends. Archie's chief target in the scene is Phoebe; he believes he "pities" her "wholeheartedly" because of her age, her devotion and her mediocrity.

Osborne's description of Archie states that he believes his pity "has prevented him from leaving her twenty years ago" (p. 34). Throughout the number Archie mirrors this belief:

She's tired and she's getting old. She's tired, and she's tired of me. Nobody ever gave her two pennyworth of equipment except her own pretty unimpressive self to give anything else to the rest of the world. All it's given her is me, and my God she's tired of that! . . . They know what sort of a bastard I am, love. I think they know almost as well as you do (pp. 55-6).

Before his insulting of "poor, pathetic old" Phoebe, with "her muzzy under-developed, untrained mind" (p. 54), Archie places the whole family, except Jean, on a level below the rest of the world. However, his subsequent attack upon Phoebe places him even below this. When she emphasizes her comic spirit--that she tries--he must counter with a self-image that negates that: "We're all just waiting for the little yellow van to come" (p. 56). The image of emotional death continues to the end of the scene.

JEAN: I don't even know what I'm feeling.
I don't even know if I do at all.
ARCHIE: Never mind, dear. I didn't know that
for years, either. You're a long time
dead, . . . let's make it a party (p. 59).

The statement of spiritual death is followed by the performances in the music hall with Archie's "face held open by a grin, and dead behind the eyes" (p. 59). Number Seven's song presents Archie as "the ordinary bloke," who is "Not mad for women, . . . not a soak" and who is therefore "a moderate." He joins the fellowship of other men in their patriotism. But the setting reinforces his image of decadent elevation: The gag title ("My girl's always short of breath, but she don't mind a good blow through"), the scenery with the "nude

in Britannia's helmet and holding a bulldog and trident"; the bang-on lighting; and the background music "'Land of Hope and Glory.'" The usual randy jokes culminate in his assertion that there is nothing real and everything shoddy about him. He even delivers them with the stumbling gait of the drunk. The whole level of the performance is much more coarse and crude than any other numbers. He seems at the epitome of his decadence; yet even as he performs, his relationship to the audience belies a rather frantic plea for them to confirm his elevation. He cannot allow himself the emotional mediocrity which Mick's homecoming may elicit (pp. 60-1).

In Number Eight Archie's elevated posture begins to dissolve. First, his transcendent occupation as entertainer is assailed by Phoebe's desire to move to Canada and manage a hotel. Archie terms the plan "horse manure" (p. 67) since it would not allow him to be a man in the only way he knows--as entertainer. He explains his lack of ambition because "you can't buy draught Bass in Toronto" (p. 68). Archie then relates his "biggest compliment" when two nuns "crossed themselves" (p. 69) upon the sight of him. However, Archie's defenses are dropped in the latter part of the scene when he finally is drunk (for the first time in the play). He "sings and orchestrates his speech as only a drunken man can, almost objectively and fastidiously, like a conductor controlling his own sound [emphasis mine]" (p. 70). Without the energy needed for his artificial guise, Archie speaks of himself as a man who could feel but now cannot because of the times. The objectivity of Archie's drunkenness separates the man from the artifice. Archie's great fear is that he will be embraced

by the comic world--the English society. In order to avoid this he becomes the antithesis of that society--a seedy entertainer. However, this husk hides a real idealistic core. Many of Archie's ideals--like Jimmy Porter's and George Dillon's--are derived from the Edwardian past that he mocks in Billy. These ideals have been implied in the songs: patriotism, great concerns, grand emotions. His Edwardian education of thirty years ago is part of his image when he leaves the music hall: "He wears glasses and has a slight stoop, from a kind of offhand pedantry which he originally assumed thirty years ago when he left one of those minor public day schools in London. . . . Some of his fellow artists call him 'Professor' occasionally, . . . " (pp. 33-4). His wariness in insulting Jean illustrates his real respect for "People of intellect and sophistication." But Archie does not espouse pure Edwardianism because he recognizes its essential rigidity. His first wife was a "person of principle" who "knew how people should behave, and there were no two ways about it" (p. 70). Nevertheless, his idealism, derived from the grand passions of the past is epitomized by an "old fat negress." This woman presents the past ideals without the past evils of moral structure, class structure, material concerns, racial prejudice. Instead, although she was a "poor and lovely and oppressed" whore, she was able to make "a pure, just natural noise" "singing her heart out to the whole world." To Archie, this noise is an indication that the society can survive; for the woman presents hope and strength for the human race--the ability to "make the most beautiful fuss in the

world" (pp. 70-1).

This ideal of a pure natural response can not be attained in Archie's society. The very image of the poor, old, lonely, black whore negates all the values in the contemporary society: youthful ambition, material wealth, egocentricity. Archie tells Jean that the only way to live in their society is to

get yourself a technique. You can smile darn you, smile, and look the friendliest jolliest thing in the world, but you'll be just as dead and smug and used up, and sitting on your hands just like everybody else (p. 72).

To avoid becoming part of the common miasma, Archie transcends in his extreme "technique" for life in the society. He fears if he ever confronts his ideal (emotional response) he will react in the common way--he'll be really spiritually dead. When Archie says "I don't feel a thing" (p. 72) it is only a rhetorical pose which insulates him against the contingency of a real lack of feeling--uniting him with his fellow Englishmen.

The fear of discovery of his real nature prompts Archie's reiteration of his elevated depravity. He proceeds from an assessment of the society and his brotherhood with it--"I'm dead, just like the whole inert, shoddy lot out there. It doesn't matter because I don't feel a thing, and neither do they" (p. 72), to an elevated position among them. He is going to leave Phoebe for a twenty year old rich girl--not because of any feelings but to shock the world. He is now sober enough to shove off reality with a picture of himself as a sexual "seven day a week man" (p. 73) who sees women as "Just a piece of bacon on the slab." He begins this routine exactly as he

does in the music hall: "You wouldn't think I was sexy to look at me, would you?" The technique is interrupted by the converging of society and reality: Mick is dead and the income tax man arrives.

Archie's reaction to the income tax man is that "I've been expecting him for twenty years." He reacts to Mick's death "slowly singing the blues" (p. 73). Even though the reaction was natural to the negro, it is not to Archie--but it is spontaneous. As the society drags him into its monetary miasma, Archie confronts his real artificiality. The weariness and near-inertia of his "blues" contrasts with the energy and exuberance of his conscious artifice. This comic reality does not celebrate life but accepts death.

The audience reaction to Archie's hurt is ambivalent. The A-effect requires that they laugh when he cries. And they do, to an extent; for his reaction "can reveal only the depths of his tragic artificiality."⁵⁴ The spontaneity of the reaction, however, causes them to be moved also. The Brechtian episodic frame has allowed the audience to be constantly aware of the ritualistic nature of Archie's elevated depravity. The announcement of Mick's death finds Archie too intoxicated to muster the energy for his role; and so, the reality shines through. He is not transcendent--in this society. He is a brother to the audience; they can sympathize with him.

The rest of the play presents Archie trying to recapture his transcendent position but ultimately failing when he must face the income tax man and mediocrity in Canada. He regains his composure

⁵⁴ Bamber Gascoigne, Twentieth-Century Drama (London: Hutchinson & Co. [Publishers] LTD, 1962), p. 198.

enough at Billy's funeral to insult everyone's ineffectual emotionalism with his "vacuity." Archie persuades Billy to go back to the music hall for money to preserve Archie's freedom. Billy forgets his "sense of self-preservation" because he cares about Archie--but, he dies. The death thrusts Archie, with his own emotional emptiness, into the world of responsibility of one human for another. He cannot even sing a farewell for Billy at the music hall. After Archie's other plan to overcome society, marriage to the twenty year old, is thwarted he can only speak of himself as a non-man: "old Archie isn't going to get his oats after all" (p. 82). At this point, the concepts of comic responsibility and human compromise are articulated by Jean. She is not going back to Graham but remaining with Phoebe: "We've only got ourselves" (p. 85). Archie then compromises with material life and responsibility as he goes with Phoebe to Canada or alone to jail. When Archie is given the choice of Canada or prison by his brother he rejects Canada. But there is a real ambiguity in this response. We do not really know if the answer is part of his elevated wastrel image or is sincere. When he leaves the stage for Phoebe's waiting arms and the income tax man the ambiguity is not resolved. The critical consensus is "prison." But the resolution of this problem is really not crucial--it makes little difference. To Archie, Canada and prison are both part of the mediocre bourgeois world that he seeks to transcend. With either choice he will be embraced by the comic world while maintaining the public image of decadence.

In the thirteenth number the comic impasse is central. Archie's routine presents his acceptance of the comic world of responsibility, mediocrity, and inert spirit because he leaves the stage with Phoebe.

Nevertheless, his routine presents his unforgiveness of the comic decision. The routine reprises all the artifice of eccentricity--at an even more frenzied pace than ever before. The routine is the ultimate in randy bad taste:

What about her, eh--Madam with the helmet on? I reckon she's sagging a bit, if you ask me. . . . Nice couple of fried eggs, anyway (p. 86).

"Say your jelly-roll is fine, but it don't compare with mine" (p. 87).

Archie is aware that the artifice and the transcendence must cease because the man with the hook is the income tax man who will place him with everyone else in "the fertilizer business" (p. 87). He translates his disapproval through his art--he tells a joke in which a man reaches heaven and is profane in expressing his one-word disappointment. Ironically Saint Peter is delighted since the profanity has relieved the tedium. "'I love you, my son. With all my soul, I shall love you always. I have been waiting to hear that word ever since I came here'" (p.88). The irreverence is not mediocre; it at least indicates energy and vitality. Archie's final near-profane performance expresses the same disappointment and the audience (St. Peter) reveres his disapproval. The final lines effect the connection between entertainer and entertained. The roles are infinitely reversible; in the English society everyone must entertain to ease the pain. The only difference is the degree. "You've been a good audience. . . . Let me know where you're working tomorrow night--and I'll come and see YOU" (p. 89). Since Archie is part of the world his plight is everyone's plight. Osborne uses the Brechtian A-effect

to elicit our emotional assessment of the seedy, shoddy, old entertainer. For he is entering the PARADISE of the audience (material possession) and they feel sorry for him (and themselves). The frenetic music and lighting and the frenzied performance of Archie Rice finally contrasts to the stage darkness and his weary acceptance of the mundane raincoat and hat. Archie's vitality as the decadent entertainer seems ultimately better than his real inertia in the English society.

The comic contest in The World of Paul Slickey is essentially the same as the one in The Entertainer--but with one important difference. Paul Slickey/Jack Oakham believes he can separate his public and private image; he thinks it is possible to combat the contemporary English society with his ideals and honor unscathed. The play proves him incorrect. In all three of Osborne's previous plays there has been a compromise before the hero faces the comic impasse of acceptance but unforgiveness of contemporary England. Jimmy Porter settles for his transcendent naturalism when he finds he cannot achieve elevation through Edwardian idealism. Archie Rice compromises his schooling and ideals for the society by becoming the consummate Englishman--an entertainer who is spiritually dead. His transcendence is achieved by his exaggerated imitation of the society he mocks.

Jack Oakham does not make this initial concession in his choice of transcendent roles; consequently Osborne's focus in The World of Paul Slickey is more upon the society and its relationship to the hero as it was in Epitaph for George Dillon. Osborne's picture of

the English society presents the utter impossibility of Jack Oakham being untouched by Paul Slickey. Therefore, even though Jack throws off his guise of Paul Slickey at the end of the play, the audience knows Paul Slickey has penetrated within Jack Oakham.

There seems to be no ostensive comic contest between the hero and the world in The World of Paul Slickey. Paul Slickey appears to be the consummate Englishman. He seems to be the natural offspring of the contemporary society. There seems to be no separation between the musical element of the play and its subject matter. The play looks like the typical musical comedy--but Brecht intrudes. To rouse the audience past the smile of detachment Osborne lulls them into an expectation of the usual luke-warm musical comedy and then breaks the conventions. Scene 1 opens with "a cloth covered in large keyholes" which disappears after the six lady journalists and the six men journalists dance with newspapers--not each other. A cloth which represents "a sheet of newsprint" printed with "Paul Slickey" is a backdrop for the first silhouetted appearance of Paul Slickey who is either embracing a girl or using a cigarette holder. As Slickey goes through the news "a linotype operator clatters out his words and pictures and words appear on the column" (p. 123) of newsprint. The news presents a "colorful milestone in the National Drive for organized triviality" (p. 124). The pictures present all levels of the upper society (the common man is absent) with increasing irony:

Photograph projected on to screen showing three typical Guards officers in civvies . . . a regal lady in tiara bowing graciously from a Rolls Royce . . . a bad-tempered-looking Bishop in gaiters, pushing aside a small boy. . . . three pigs at a party (p. 124).

The orchestral chords and the general levity counterpoint the subject matter. Immediately after the projection screen fades out, Jo, Slickey's secretary, reads from more of his news copy. This article expresses the incongruity that the staging already pointed out:

"As I walked away from the pageantry, the happy crowds, the faces of those loyal subjects, . . . I saw shining on my cheeks, a small column of tears. . . . There are times when it is good to be an Englishman" (pp. 124-5).

The entire play works in this manner. As Osborne presents vignettes of the English society in 1959, the vacuity at the core shines through the glossy appearance. The audience is never allowed to dully sit back and feel how good it is to be an Englishman. They must be constantly alert as Osborne exposes their pretenses. The smooth and lulling musical comedy elements consequently become almost cacophonous (or what Hayman terms "irritating chaos"⁵⁵). Osborne uses the various elements to punctuate the disparity between the appearance and the reality--(of the initial use of the dance and orchestra). The chief musical comedy device in the play is the song. The songs in the play are often criticized because "the lyrics are too explicit, too complex, and the prosody is painfully awkward for clean musical delivery."⁵⁶ Thus, Osborne is charged with the inability to write singable and scannable lyrics.⁵⁷ However, because the songs do not fit in the musical-comedy mold they effect the intellectual and

⁵⁵ Hayman, John Osborne, p. 51.

⁵⁶ Observer, 10 May 1959.

⁵⁷ Findlater, "The Case of Paul Slickey," p. 35.

emotional confrontations Osborne requires.

The World of Paul Slickey presents the English society through two settings: the newspaper, The Daily Racket, and the home of the Mortlake family, Jack Oakham's (alias Paul Slickey) in-laws. These two settings are united only by Slickey-Oakham. The chief story line at Mortlake Hall is the impending death of the head of the household. Everyone is concerned, not for the usual reasons, but because of the problem of death duties:

Old man Mortlake gave away his entire estate five years ago to the family to avoid death duties. Well almost five years--five years all but about forty-eight hours. If he doesn't last out the weekend the Income Tax Man will move in and whip the lot like a fully recovered German (p. 130).

As in The Entertainer the material imperative is all important in the society. Slickey-Oakham unites the Mortlake plot to the press because he is expected to play traitor through his infiltration of the family (who doesn't know his real occupation) and get the inside dope of the exact time of death for his publisher. The episodes are strung along this basic plot line. The tenor of the entire plot is, of course, a whirlwind, almost absurd, confusion with time rushing past. Since time usually stands still when waiting for an important event (the death of Mortlake), Osborne's presentation of time's hurly-burly accomplishes an audience awareness of the vacuity of the society. The episodes include five love affairs: Oakham and his secretary, Jo, Oakham and his sister-in-law, Oakham's wife and her sister's husband, Lord Mortlake and a former liason, Mrs. Giltledge-Whyte (the reunion of the two hastens Lord Mortlake's demise), and Mrs. Giltledge-Whyte's daughter Gillian and a rock-n-roll star, Terry Maroon. There is also

an impossible sex reversal.

The society is seen through Osborne's typical concern--its effects upon the people. Alan Carter criticizes that although the play "is about people, they lack vitality and compassion";⁵⁸ but this is Osborne's exact point. The spiritual emptiness runs the gamut from the common man to Paul Slickey. They are all only husks:

The Common Man:

He'll be always on the bandwagon, never in
the cart.

British common sense will always prevail! . . .
We are the majority, we are the ones who
matter!

I believe in Britain! Life is quite morbid
enough as it is! We are solid and so are you
(pp. 128-9).

The Navy on Ship Duty:

What are you thinking, sir? Thinking, Hawksworth, thinking. I
was just wondering if Celia had remembered to pay the boy's
school fees in advance (p. 129).

Michael Oakham's brother-in-law having an affair with his wife Lesley,
and a "quintessential parliamentarian":

The reason that we've always come through
flourishing
Is that English common sense is so astonishingly
nourishing
Other nations less endowed
Go along with all the crowd
Using logic and statistics
When all they need is parliamentary linguistics
(p. 142).

It's a consideration we'd do well to bear in mind
It is not unsensible to sound stupid to be kind

⁵⁸ Carter, John Osborne, p. 114.

To politicians words mean different things
 You have to cheat on the roundabouts and
 swindle on the swings
 (p. 143).

Lesley, Oakham's wife, who becomes a man at the end:

I think that's why I admire you, Michael. Even if your judgments aren't usually correct, you're so clear-sighted and level-headed.

Marriage is quite disgusting. For one thing it makes intimacy quite impossible. To say nothing of passion (pp. 166-7).

Lady Mortlake:

She is in the long tradition of magnificently gracious ninnies so familiar to English playgoers.

I wonder if that's where I first got it [carrying flowers] from! I've never been very fond of flowers as you know. I think one learns so much from the theatre, don't you? One can watch people as they really are and behave. All doing those tiny little things that seem to be so inconsequential at first glance but which are really quite fundamental and full of significance (pp. 137-8).

Mummy's been so terribly brave. . . . I remember how she was when they gave away India. But she's been even more wonderful this time (p. 134).

Trewin, "an embittered man," the butler:

Trewin has the highest possible respect and admiration for private enterprise. Why, he was a Trade Union Official for years. Until he was sent to Coventry by his workmates (p. 139).

Lady Giltedge-Whyte, Lord Mortlake's former lover, who upholds the genteel Edwardian values (One of her songs "Bring Back the Axe" is delivered as a performance with many breaks to different parts of the stage and obvious gestures: "She flops her head holds her arms at shoulder level." The entrance into the song as well as the resumption of the plot is quite choppy. Besides, the song is only obliquely related to the plot.):

As for these people with their envy and class hatred,
 hanging is too good for them. How drab and uniform

they wish to make life nowadays! And now they are trying to do the same thing with death. . . .

Bring back the axe
Listen to the facts
Hanging's so sordid and mean
The axe is so bright and so clean
Executions become so much duller
Oh, why don't they bring back some color.
The Welfare State is so drab
So give me his head on a slab
Oh, why don't they bring back the axe
(pp. 147-8).

Paul Slickey is the quintessence of this world. Therefore, like Archie Rice, he must affect spiritual emptiness in order to elevate himself. The world's ambitions, petty concerns, and vices would only demean him.

I'm twenty-eight years old,
And practically everybody, anybody, anything . . .
You can think of leaves me
Quite completely
Newspaper neatly
.
Quite, quite cold (p. 131).

Paul must affect this pose because he is a journalist "who investigates vice, denounces prominent homosexuals and Labour M.P.'s who try to be socialists, disturbs [the common man] about the divorce rate and the decline of . . . Christian heritage" (pp. 128-9). However, these duties merely gloss over the real emptiness in the society; thus, the press aids and abets the society's emptiness. In order to do this the press must be more vacuous than the society it "serves." There is an intricate intertwining relationship between the world and the press:

And you [the world] will say to the ultimate journalist, as he leans unsteadily against the bar of deceit, as he asks the questions that prevent real questions being asked, you will look up

into his face and say: (Kneels downstage center.)

Because of you, I am,
Before, I never was, but now I exist,
You drink, therefore I am (p. 155).

As Paul Slickey presents his public image, complete with a girl at his side and shabby raincoat, he always delivers the image as performance, as a role. Osborne accomplishes this through songs and dance routines. Even in the first act Paul Slickey's image is presented by Paul himself as a façade. The role hides his real self. Jack Oakham, alias Paul Slickey, believes he actually transcends the society because he is a man of ideals. As the idealist he lambastes the competitive nature of the society and its emphasis upon the material. He wants to be a dramatist whose real worth will be discovered. Unlike Archie he does not maintain transcendence by ordering reality according to his "elevated" spiritual inertia. Even as he articulates his idealism Jack Oakham's essential emptiness is alluded to. He is having an affair with his wife's sister and is afraid to explain his position to Lesley because "She'd cut my allowance if it came out" (p. 126). Oakham wishes to be the idealist and actually believes he is spiritually vital; but he does not possess the vitality that can even attempt to will his ideal into existence like the other Osborne heroes. Even though Slickey-Oakham is in the throes of the typical Osborne comic dialectic, his world does not allow him enough energy to make the grand beautiful gesture. Instead of glamorizing Slickey (as Hayman states)⁵⁹ Osborne uncharacteristically seems to be presenting a hero who is incapable of capturing the audience's attention

⁵⁹ Hayman, John Osborne, p. 49.

because he is "not dominant or human enough."⁶⁰ Yet, in the context of the play's world Oakham is, at least, the only character who attempts to rectify his real spiritual inertia by confronting it. He may not have the energy to will his private ideal; but he does effect a decline of his public transcendent image of spiritual coldness once he recognizes the tainting of his real spirit. And as he immerses himself in the common world he is not complacent. He captures the audience's attention as he focuses upon the fact that everything is not alright in England. Through his dilemma they must confront the contradictions in English life.

Jack begins to recognize his real emptiness in scene 2 (although the audience has already been aware of the disparity between his vision of himself as Jack Oakham, playwright, and Jack Oakham, philandering husband). His rendezvous with Deirdre in the Marsden Room's bed displays his inability to really feel or communicate. He is described as constantly "out of his depth" or trying "to think of something to say" (p. 133). His song iterates his concern with the carnal and not the spiritual while placing the blame upon the society:

They'll take the "I" and the "must" from our
personal
Lust for a voice at a microphone. . . .
Let passion go out of fashion!
Let the groin give a last great groan.
Let the lamb lie down with the lion
This fulfills our grand design.
We'll be in the desert,
We'll be in the desert,
We'll be in the desert and alone (pp. 135-6).

⁶⁰ Carter, John Osborne, p. 114.

Many of the gestures of his transcendent public role are repeated in his presentation of his private reality to imply the essential similarity between them.

When Jack returns to the newsroom his spiritual emptiness as Paul Slickey is juxtaposed to only a questioning of his ideals. He no longer asserts his idealism.

Somewhere in all this chaos there must
be some values I want to preserve.

There must be a place for me somewhere
in all this!

Why do people use their bodies as points
of escape and not as objects of love
[which the preceding scene presents him
doing]?

Am I as trivial as this?

Could I be great (pp. 157-8)?

The scene ends, in song, with more questioning of his real essence. The song reverses his concept of appearance and reality. He now recognizes that his idealism or spiritual greatness is "deception" and "whispered imperception" and "lies we long to mutter." The reality is the "role"--he is really in a "gutter." With this recognition, Jack requests that the lies be told to him later, not now. He also steps outside of the keyhole cloth, which "comes in behind him". This action and song prepares the audience for Jack's final rejection of the world of Paul Slickey (p. 159).

Jack's rejection of the world follows his realization of the dilemma created by its emptiness. He realizes the gutter or spiritual inertia that he lives in; but when he seeks to rectify it, he can only

opt for more of the same.

There must be something I can do,
Something to believe,
Something better, something matters, . . .

But the only alternative he sees is in

This island of phlegm,
It's our staple apology,
Our apophthegm
It's them! Them!
[Chorus and Jack, accuse the audience] (p. 173).

After an abortive sex-change procedure, Lesley becomes a man and Deirde prefers her to Jack because of her competitive spirit and success. Jack dresses up as a woman, but does not become one. His womanliness is part of his disillusionment and recognition of the loss of his ideals: "Jack has always suffered from excessive aspiration. There is a constant stain of endeavor underneath his emotional armpits. It throws off quite an unpleasant smell of sour ideals." Jack no longer has any purpose at Mortlake Hall. When he returns to the press, he continues the almost tragic question of where he can go and what he can do. But he finds almost all other professions all variations of the press' function--to persevere in the face of emptiness: M.P., Peer, magistrate, soldier, scientist. He is finally immersed in the ordinary comic world. With his rejection of the ethic of material success, the question "who did you say you were?" can no longer be answered, "Paul Slickey". He leaves the stage "disgusted" (p. 216) as another man becomes Paul Slickey. Paul-Jack is ultimately not transcendent in any way; he is part of the common man whom the press manipulates and hates. The "hatred" for the common man ends the play in the guise of a song exalting the press. Osborne's final scene

reverses the usual musical comedy love theme while presenting a last unsettling look at the world of Paul Slickey. The exaltation of the press counterpoints the dejection of Jack, in his "elevation" to common man. Of course, this elevation is a comic impasse for Jack; for his self image was the idealist in the world without ideals. He confronts his normalcy; he emotionally rejects its value.

CHAPTER IV

BRECHTIAN EPIC THEATRE AND THE CONFRONTATION OF THE

PERSONAL AND HISTORICAL IRONIES--LUTHER,

A PATRIOT FOR ME AND A PLACE

CALLING ITSELF ROME

The settings of Luther and A Patriot for Me are not contemporary England. Although both plays use music, the primary Brechtian influence is in setting the plays in another time, another place. Brecht's use of historical (versus contemporary) incidents mirrors his belief that man is essentially comic. Because neither man's essence nor the environment is a fixed quantity, historical incidents are unique, transitory, "created and maintained by men (and will in due course be altered by them)."¹ The sense of inevitability in history obviates the empathy that Brecht so sedulously avoids. History plays are not only about the past; since they focus attention upon the social movements in the past, they also tend to focus the same attention upon the social conditions of the audience. If the past is alterable, so is the present. If the past has a future, so does the present. All history plays are really about the playwright's own time.² But Brecht's use of the historical incidents never overshadows

¹ Brecht, Brecht on Theatre, p. 190.

² Eric Bentley, "Introduction: The Science Fiction of Bertolt Brecht," ed. of Brecht's Galileo, English Version by Charles Laughton (New York: Grove Press, 1966), p. 14.

his concern with the individual. Part of his historical stage presentation distinguishes the individual man from his historical image. Brecht's characters from history are never allowed to be simply "Everyman"; "the living, unmistakeable [sic] man, who is not quite identical with those identified with him" is constantly emphasized through the use of irony. Brecht brings out the individual by causing the contradictions between historical image ("which retain something of the rough sketching which indicated traces of other movements and features all around the fully-worked-out figure") and the living man to confront one another.³ The audience must react to such confrontation with a "free and highly mobile" intellect--similar to the reaction required in The World of Paul Slickey.

Brecht's influence on the English stage had increased by 1961 when Osborne's Luther was first performed. Besides more openings of Brecht's dramas in London, more English playwrights seemed to be emulating the German playwright with varying degrees of commercial success.⁴ One of the most successful of the Brecht-inspired history plays was Robert Bolt's A Man for All Seasons in 1960. Bolt explicitly acknowledged his debt to Brecht in the introduction to the published edition: "'the style I eventually used was a bastardized version of the one most recently associated with Bertolt Brecht.'"⁵ The public acceptance of the historical subject is probably an important

³ Brecht, Brecht on Theatre, p. 191.

⁴ Esslin, "Brecht and the English Theatre," Reflections, pp. 73-84.

⁵ Quoted in Hayman, John Osborne, p.66.

factor in Osborne's selection of Martin Luther as the subject of a play--especially after the poor reception of Paul Slickey. But Osborne does not only select a historical subject; he also is Brechtian in his treatment of Luther, and later, in 1965, Alfred Redl.

Osborne's Luther⁶ emphasizes the incongruity between the personal self-image of Luther and the historical image. Luther is a man who seeks transcendence during a time when the uncertain world does not attend to the individual or the spiritual. In order to elevate himself in this world, he envisions the world's contradictions as his enemy. Yet he is not really contesting the world but himself in the world. His egocentricity is misinterpreted in the world, and he becomes the historical figure who fights for the common man. The common man embraces the image of Martin Luther, not the man. The common man distorts the man's personal crisis and uses it for his own revolt. The society triumphs over the common man and Martin Luther. Osborne's historical play elucidates the reasons behind the failure of the German Reformation to effect complete societal reordering. The play ends with Luther's identity equivalent not to his transcendent self-image but to his historical image as the man of society who occasions the Reformation: the reality of the man is synthesized in the appearance. The play follows Brecht's concept of the dialectical material; Osborne presents Luther's appearance or historical images as concealing his essence. The play also presents the view that all

⁶ John Osborne, Luther, A Signet Book (New York: New American Library, Inc., 1961), Subsequent references will be from this edition and will appear in the text.

men are social beings who cannot avoid contact with others. Man cannot overcome society but he can make that society less inimicable. Like Jimmy Porter, Archie Rice, and all other Osborne heroes, Luther's transcendent stance is doomed because he is human, and humanity implies interaction and limitations.

Despite the fact that Luther is criticized as a too flagrant imitation of Brecht's Galileo,⁷ there are important differences which indicate Osborne's conception of the needs of the English audience. The times during which both men, Luther and Galileo, lived are a century apart but are both imprinted with the "harmony" of the Roman Catholic Church. Nevertheless, the "rebellion" or historical image is different. Galileo's discovery is outside his power to alter. He can repudiate his observation, but he cannot abolish what was observed. In both versions of the play,⁸ Galileo squanders his intellectual gift because he is a weak creature of the world who requires food, clothing, money. Brecht presents the dialectical material in Galileo because "the pleasure of drinking and washing [is] one with the pleasure which he takes in the new ideas. . . . he thinks out of self-indulgence."⁹ The audience seeing Brecht's Galileo thus questions what type of society would permit such tyranny over the intellect and such abuse of a scientific discovery. In both versions of the play,

⁷ Tynan, Tynan Right and Left, p. 78.

⁸ Bentley, "Introduction," pp. 9-42. Bentley discusses the changes in the endings at length.

⁹ Brecht, Brecht on Theatre, pp. 198-9.

Galileo the man is de-canonized; he is presented as a coward and, in the second version, a traitor. So any sympathy for the hero should be overcome by the intellectual response. Luther elicits a more ambivalent response. First, Luther's discovery is not verifiable but a product of himself. Secondly, he does not retract. So, when he finally accepts his historical image the audience can emotionally reject his immersion into the common world. Because his rebellion was effected by his heightened vitality and energy, the audience admires him and pities his descent into a world which is not unlike their own. The English audience is alienated from their stock response (indifference or even antipathy) to the German theologian. They must also intellectually assess a society which bears marked resemblance to contemporary England.

Osborne indicates the essentially alienating dichotomy between Luther, the man, and Luther, the epitome of the Reformation, by the setting. In the three episodes of Act One the setting is an "intense private interior . . . with its outer darkness and rich, personal objects;" but in the remaining nine scenes of Acts Two and Three "the physical effect" is "more intricate, general, less personal; sweeping, concerned with men in time rather than particular man in the unconscious, caricature not portraiture, like the popular woodcuts of the period, like DÜRER" (p. 56). Consequently, Osborne obeys Brecht's dictum that the historical play always present the distinguishing marks of the past to "keep their impermanence always before our eyes, so that our own period can be seen to be impermanent too."¹⁰ However, Osborne

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 190.

achieves this air of impermanence by focusing on the images the past presents of Luther. Since these images are juxtaposed to the personal reality in Act One Osborne presents the contradictory and uncertain nature of life in that past.

In Act One the constant emphasis is Martin Luther's concept of the world. The focus is not upon the world itself but Martin's vision of it. The setting counterpoints the personal vision of this world obsession--Martin is ensconced in the Eremite cloister. To Martin the world of the sixteenth century is precarious, and dark--both physically and spiritually. Osborne juxtaposes Luther's dark vision of life with that of his father, Hans. Luther's life experiences have been limited, but Hans is completely immersed in the society. He has lost two sons to the plague; he must struggle. Still, he somehow endures and maintains his identity and a semblance of dignity. He laughs at those who quake in fear of an imminent Apocalypse. "I could drink this convent piss from here till Gabriel's horn--and from all accounts, that'll blow about next Thursday--so what's the difference" (p. 47)? He bows to the hostilities of life and tempers this concession with material possession. His life ethic is survival with as much comfort and dignity as possible: "[he is] a stocky man, . . . lower-middle class, on his way to become a small, primitive capitalist; bewildered, full of pride and resentment" (p. 12). His negative reaction to Martin's becoming a monk is based upon his concept of life as a lusty, spirited struggle.

Your old man's strong enough. . . . because we've got to be, . . . Because if we aren't strong, it won't take any time at all before

we're knocked flat on our backs, or flat on our knees, or flat on something or other. Flat on our backs and finished, and we can't afford to be finished because if we're finished, that's it, that's the end, so we just have to stand up to it as best we can. But that's life, isn't it (p. 41)?

To Hans, Martin has run away from the struggle, "abusing his youth" (the young are best able to fight) "with fear and humiliation" (p. 51). Hans is also concerned because Martin, his only surviving son, is a scholar and could be "a man of stature" (p. 16) in control of his life. Throughout Act One Hans thus sees Martin as a woman. He calls him a "bride" (p. 43) who "looks like a woman" (p. 44). In the world of 1500 manhood is achieved in the struggle with life; those who abstain cannot be men. Hans even believes that Martin entered the cloister because he feared the world: "that day when you were coming home from Erfurt, and the thunderstorm broke, and you were so piss-scared, you lay on the ground and cried out to St. Anne because you saw a bit of lightning and thought you'd seen a vision" (p. 53). Martin is afraid of even the most natural phenomena.

Hans Luther's assessment of his son is presented after Luther's transcendent stance is delineated. Hans' survival ethic counterpoints Martin's intensified vision of his world.

Martin Luther's transcendent stance is achieved in the cloister by exaggerating the abstinence from life that his father abhors. Martin elevates himself over society by placing himself outside of it in the cloister; he is too spiritually aware to obey the authority of the world personified by his father. In the cloister he transcends the authority of the Order and ultimately God. Martin views all authority in the same light: "Churches, Kings, and fathers--why do they ask so

much, and why do they all of them get so much more than they deserve?" (p. 50). Luther's elevation over the Order is achieved not by severing the yoke of obedience but by making it tighter. In the First Act whenever Martin is in the fellowship of the monks he transcends through a deeper spirituality. The other monks have vestiges of the outside world; Martin does not. When the monks publically confess their sins, Martin is elevated by his greater sins. The gesture of the scene emphasizes the elevation: "they all prostrate themselves. . . . MARTIN . . . prostrates himself downstage behind the rest" (p. 19). Even in a communal confession Martin cannot immerse himself in the community. The sins of the other monks are trivial and usually deal with some transgression of the order's ritual: wantonness, tardiness, clumsiness, laziness.

Martin's sins stress his singularity: "I am alone. I am alone, and against myself" (p. 20). Most of his sins are not real but unconscious. By recounting his dreams and visions as sins he not only presents himself as sinless in the eyes of the community (since sin must be willed) but at the same time presents his rejection of the community of men and his own humanity. His confessed dreams illustrate his fear of the outside world. Unlike the other monks who must wean themselves from the delights of the flesh, Martin sees the outside world as a place where he will lose his identity because he will be prey to the common human vices.

I am a worm and no man, a byword and a laughing stock. . . . I was fighting a bear in a garden without flowers, leading into a desert. His claws kept making my arms bleed as I tried to open a gate which would take me out. But the gate was no gate at all. It was simply an open frame, and I could have walked through it, but I was covered

in my own blood, and I saw a naked woman riding on a goat, and the goat began to drink my blood, and I thought I should faint with the pain. . . . I was among a group of people, men and women, fully clothed. We lay on top of each other in neat rows about seven or eight across. . . . Suddenly, I panicked--although I was on top of the pile--and I cried: what about those underneath? . . . We all got up in an orderly way, without haste, and when we looked, those at the bottom were not simply flattened by the weight, they were just their clothes. . . .if I were all bone, I could brandish myself without terror, without any terror at all--I could be indestructible (pp. 19-21).

Luther's view of life conforms to his father's, to an extent. But he does not feel it is possible to retain any dignity in this world. His fear confirms his father's appraisal of his vocation. Martin not only fears the loss of his spiritual identity that will render him only a shell, an exterior, a non-man. He also questions his ability to struggle physically in the world--against the bear, an Osborne image of the macho-man, against the lure of sexuality of a naked girl, against death itself. Even the cloister does not shelter him from these world threats. The monks bring the world inside the cloister.

In order to maintain his identity in the cloister Martin constantly and zealously proves himself elevated over the "worldly" Order; Martin's communal confession also projects his transcendent posture of the ascetic martyr. While he confesses his dreams which really indicate his cowardly fear of the world, he effects elevation by assigning the cause to the devil. His perspiration becomes "the devil's bath." His confession of his sin against humility is not humble as he assigns himself "lower and lower and of less account than all other men" because he is "sometimes discontented with the meanest and worst of everything" (p. 22). Even as he verbally flails himself he elevates himself. As he claims submission to the order, he questions his latrine

duties and turns the questioning into an elevation. When he is told to fast--because of the mutterings in his heart--he fasts beyond the time he is told. He must always exceed the proscription so that it is not a limitation of his freedom.

Later, in Act Two, when Luther meets with the Vicar General Johann Von Staupitz, his mortifications are termed ironically, his "meat and drink". Staupitz articulates his view of Martin with "a successful astringent mixture of sympathy and ridicule" (p. 61). He sees the young monk's desire to elevate himself because of his fear of the world:

You're obsessed with the Rule because it serves very nicely as a protection for you. . . . Protection against the demands of your instincts . . . by your exaggerated attention to the Rule, you make the authority ridiculous. And the reason you do that is because you're determined to substitute that authority with something else--yourself.

Osborne's use of Martin's mortifications as indicative of his self-image, his "meat and drink", has obvious parallels with Galileo in which Galileo's eating and thinking are both signs of his self-indulgence (pp. 62-3).

After the confession ends, "MARTIN is lost to sight in the ranks of his fellow MONKS." But this immersion in the community does not last; Martin has a seizure: "Presently, there is a quiet, violent moaning. . . . MARTIN appears, and staggers between the stalls . . . he is seized in a raging fit." As Martin is carried out he delineates what the confessions have indicated; Martin cannot exist in a community because he is not in control (the fit). He "roar[s] out a word at a time. . . . Not! Me! I am not!" After these words the attack climaxes with

the presence of blood, saliva, and vomit. The worldly images in his dreams of fear become real. To indicate the incongruity between this conduct and the yoke of obedience--"The Office continues as if nothing has taken place" (pp. 22-3).

In Scene 2, Martin is about to perform his first Mass. Osborne does not present this spectacle since it would serve to immerse Martin in his community. Instead, the scene is an intensely personal presentation of Martin's self-image. The initial setting is a non-realistic mirror of the concerns in his dreams:

A knife, like a butcher's, hanging aloft, the size of a garden fence. The cutting edge of the blade points upwards. Across it hangs the torso of a naked man, his head hanging down. Below it, an enormous round cone, like the inside of a vast barrel, surrounded by darkness . . . blending light inside.

Martin enters the stage against the light, "haggard and streaming with sweat," and articulates the fears the set suggests. He begins by explaining that he "lost the body of a child . . . was afraid, and . . . went back to find it. But [he is] still afraid, . . . and there's an end to it" (p. 24)! To Martin, a child is the only one who can submit to authority and be truly and happily immersed in the world. In the later scene with his father, Martin explains what happened to him when the child's body was lost. On a day when his mother was beating him he discovered that the pain no longer "seemed outside of me in some way, as if it belonged to the rest of the world, and not only me." Instead, Martin says his pain "belonged to me and no one else" (p. 53). Martin states that this incident, which drew his blood, marks the initial fissure between him and his mother. Somehow Martin expected the cloister to replace her, and his father--who always disappointed him. In going

to the cloister Martin was seeking the lost body of the child. But his ego will not allow him to bow to the authority of the Order.

Martin also cannot find his manhood because it implies the struggle with the world's physical traps. The overall image of the setting is of castration with the head only capturing the light. The rest of the body is part of the world's darkness. "The lost body of a child, hanging on a mother's tit, and close to the warm big body of a man, and I can't find it." Martin continues his litany of fears: "I'm afraid of the darkness, and the hole in it" (p. 24). In his later meeting with Staupitz Luther characterizes the world as "the last age of time" with nothing "more left but the black bottom of the bucket" (p. 65). He says that he sees the darkness and the hole "sometime of every day! . . . and there's no bottom to it, no bottom to my breath, and I can't reach it" (p. 24). The figure in the setting is an image of his search. The castrated figure is seeking the only light in the darkness of the world. This light shines upon Martin's face and causes his blindness to what is at the bottom. Later in the play, with Staupitz, the darkness is described as the place where God judges men. Luther's own intellect blinds him to God's judgment. The only important judgment is his own.

Luther unites his vision of the world and his inability to see if anything is at the bottom of the darkness with his experiences in his "little monk's house," the jakes. He explains his inability to reach the darkness at the bottom because "there's a bare fist clenched to my bowels and they can't move . . . (p. 24). The setting presents the incongruity of this reasoning. Primarily, the setting indicates an opposite physical position focusing upon the head as the seeker after the

light which shines on itself. Consequently, Luther's reasoning establishes the relationship between his physical mortifications and his spiritual strivings. For Staupitz and Hans sensibly and realistically tell him that his physical bowel problems are connected to his fears of the world which include his rejection of all worldly authority: "There's always something the matter with you. . . . If it's not the gripes, insomnia, or faith and works, it's boils or indigestion . . ." (p. 66). Notice the juxtapositions. Luther uses his physical problems as indications that he is not immersed in the darkness of the world. His strength and his weakness are one. The problems also reinforce his martyr image because the devil again seems to be singling him out to torture. The "scatological imagery is almost all lifted from Luther's sermons or his Table Talk."¹¹ Many of these quotes are quoted in Young Man Luther by Erik H. Erickson which was published in England in 1959. Erickson's approach to Luther is psychoanalytical.¹² The publication of such a book would certainly have caught Osborne's attention; but Osborne does not rely on the book solely. His play moves out of the arena of the psyche in Act Two. Also, Osborne does not fail in his use of the Luther speeches. These speeches function as more than the mere spicing up of the dialogue that Robert Brustein suggests.¹³ The imagery of the jakes mirrors Luther's fears of the world and his belief in his own

¹¹Robert Brustein, Seasons of Discontent: Dramatic Opinions 1959-1965 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), p. 196.

¹²Some of the parallel speeches in the play and the Erickson book are listed in Hayman, pp. 66-7.

¹³Brustein, Seasons of Discontent, p. 196.

elevation above it.

The preparation for the Mass follows this scene with the realistic trappings of the Order including a "small house on the upstage left of the stage: a bagpipe of the period, fat, soft, foolish and obscene looking" (p. 25). Obviously, Martin is never shown with any of the vestments or candles or even entering the house where the Mass is to be said. Instead, Osborne presents Luther's solution to his inability to reach the light in the darkness of the world; he makes himself that light. In his discussion with one of the monks, Brother Weinand, Luther presents an image of God that is curiously close to his image of the world. God does not afford the shelter he seeks in the Order. He cannot be a man even in his relationship to the supreme authority:

All I can feel, all I can feel is God's hatred. . . . He's like a glutton, the way he gorges me, he's a glutton. He gorges me, and then spits me out in lumps (p. 30).

The image of God is curiously close to Jimmy Porter's picture of Alison in Look Back in Anger. God has earthly, almost naturalistic, qualities; Luther remains the tragic martyr who now is his own authority since even God will not render him a complete man. Brother Weinand angrily explains to Martin that his belief that he's the "only man living who's baited, and surrounded by dreams, and afraid to move" is not because God is angry, but because Luther is angry:

You're a fool. You're really a fool. God isn't angry with you. It's you who are angry with Him (p. 33).

Luther does not heed his words and reiterates his elevation: "Am I the only one to see all this, and suffer?" (p. 33). Osborne punctuates the incongruity of Luther's concerns by the constant preparation for the

first Mass in the background. Luther's concern with self replaces his preparation to meet Christ. He not only ignores the background preparation but also Brother Weinand's tutoring. Luther simply does not communicate with him or anyone else. (In the next scene it is reported that he forgets part of the ritual of the Mass).

The scene ends with Luther reentering after he joins the procession for the Mass. The light in the cone intensifies as he carries in a naked child. He speaks only one line, directly to the audience: "And so, the praising ended--and the blasphemy began" (p. 34). He then returns into the cone, as the Mass ends and the light fades. Luther finds the body of a child not by praising the ultimate authority but by blasphemy. He becomes his own authority, his own God. Paradoxically, this elevation does not bring him the big warm body of a man--because a man must react in a society. The child is a new life, untainted by the world and with no responsibility to it. This child has affinities to the Christ-child--a God made human. With Luther as his own authority, the child will never have to face the bottom of the bucket where God judges men. It will exist in the light of Luther's mind.

When Martin goes to his reception after the Mass the Order and the world (his father Hans) are represented. The criticism of Hans forces Martin to strike out at all authority and explain his elevated stance. Hans tells Martin that he would "like to pretend that you made yourself, that it was you who made you." Martin replies as a God: "I am--that's all I need to give you" (p. 50). The scene ends with Hans questioning Martin's elevation and giving his son up for dead. All

Martin can do is wonder whether it is he that is not vital and elevated instead of the world. "But--but what if it isn't true" (p. 55)?

Act II begins eleven years later. The scene presents the "ecclesiastical huckster" (p. 57), John Tetzel, who sells indulgences. The staging now reflects the historical. However, Luther's pulpit is also present--uniting him, in his public role, with the historical incidents. The Knight, "barks" (p. 9) the time and place of this scene as he has done in Act One. So, although Act One is personal the Knight's presence always allows society to intrude. And even though Acts Two and Three are historical the pulpit's presence always permits the interaction of Luther and the society. The manner in which the Knight makes his announcements focuses attention upon the performance of the play--and, perhaps, the other performances in the play which wear the guise of reality. (The audience may well question where Luther's real self ends and his conscious performance begins.) The gestures, and performance of Tetzel emphasize the society's belief in the power of money. With the purchase of indulgences God himself, through the Pope, can be cajoled into granting eternal salvation.

The scene is followed by Martin's discussion with Staupitz. Osborne states that Staupitz "has profound respect for Martin's . . . powerful potential of insight, sensitivity, courage and, also heroics" (p. 61). Staupitz also recognizes that "a large man is worth the pains he takes" (p. 64). Therefore, the audience is always aware that Luther's transcendent stance does elevate him--even if the "child" is impossible to attain in the world of men. He is not to be admired for his discovery, like Galileo, but for his act of discovery. He is not admired

for heroism but for his heroics. In his discussion with Staupitz Martin effects elevation by referring to the world's humans in animal terms and by likening his work to the world's struggles which he fears. First, he speaks of his discovery, that men are saved by faith, in mining images. He thereby becomes equivalent to his father, and therefore all authority: "[Hans] made a discovery years and years ago that took me sweat and labour to dig out of the earth for myself." He then proceeds to elevate himself by referring to Hans in the animal image of the hog when Staupitz observes that Hans' position in the world is really a vow of poverty placing him on Martin's level: "And he took it the day he told himself, and told you, that he was a complete man, or at least, a contented man." Martin immediately retorts that "A hog waffling in its own crap is contented" and that his father "faced with an unfamiliar notion is like a cow staring at a new barn door." The hog image of Hans links him to the image of God--the glutton. Luther is against all authority or father figures (pp. 66-7).

During the scene with Staupitz Luther also repeats his scatological imagery--only it is curiously twisted. Before he complains of his own bowel problems, Luther characterizes the world as the constipated one; he boasts that he is the cause. "I'm like a ripe stool in the world's straining anus, and at any moment we're about to let each other go" (p. 65). Thus, the world he fears becomes a world where he is the feared. For Luther's bowel problems are symptomatic of his fear of human nature which must struggle in the world and face the darkness. The locking of his bowels separates him from the world of those who wallow in their own crap. But if he becomes the stool of the world,

he is the irritant. His image also includes the concept that he will leave the world's body; he will step outside of history. Ironically, as Luther presents the image the audience also sees that it shows him as simultaneously out of the world and of the world. The excrement the world may wallow in may very well be Luther. The boastful self-image of Luther also points to his comic descent in the society.

The rest of the scene with Staupitz as well as the other scenes in the play immerse Luther in the society and history. Staupitz warns Luther that his belief in self justification is essentially true but that the substance of Luther's teaching will not be as controversial as the way he upholds his belief. Staupitz understands Luther's need for a transcendence in which all authority is his enemy: "but the moment someone disagrees or objects to what you're saying, that will be the moment when you'll suddenly recognize the strength of your belief!" Luther leaves Staupitz as he repeats his scatological image with himself the chief irritant of the world: "If I break wind in Wittenberg, they might smell it in Rome (pp. 72-3).

Scene 3 of Act Two presents Luther in his public role in the pulpit with his ninety-five theses. As he enters the pulpit he sees a child who is only half-naked and dirty playing on the steps by himself. The child is sullied by the world's materialism and seems lonely in the absence of the society of men. Luther's advances to the child are repulsed, "not rudely, but naturally." The body of a child that Luther finds in Act One is in a similar position. Somehow the purity in transcendence is compromised by the world; so the body of the child naturally leaves Martin Luther. He is now the man; but, he is still

the man who seeks to be his own authority. The sermon links his belief that "'The just shall live by faith'" to his scatological imagery. His bowels were flushed when this pronouncement emerged. His self-indulgence yields a product of his mind--not physical excrement. Luther's message continues to elevate him above men. Those who join him "sing"; those who do not "howl" like animals. He requests that they follow him to the "deserted Christ." However, his desertion by the body of a child and his elevation over the "stinking goat" Aristotle and the howling non-believers effect a superimposing of his image and Christ's. His "sweet redeemer and mediator" is himself. Nevertheless, since Luther speaks directly to the audience in his pulpit on the stage's apron, they realize the effect that such a message would have on other men. Luther seems to be immersing himself in the world of common men; he seems to be leading all men past the authority of the world. As their leader, he is responsible for their actions (pp. 74-6).

In successive encounters with representatives of the world's authority Luther remains vehement in his assertions. This stance is really the same as Galileo's although it seems antithetical. Luther stands pat for the same reason Galileo recants--self-indulgence. The end scene also mirrors Galileo's betrayal of the scientific enlightenment; for Luther's assertion really betrays the common man.¹⁴ Osborne is quite consistent in presenting the encounters with their historical ramifications. History suggests the interaction of all men, not the transcendence of one. Luther's encounter with Thomas de Vio, Cajetan,

¹⁴Tynan, Tynan Right and Left, p. 78.

"Rome's highest representative" in Germany is presented against a back-cloth of any "satirical contemporary woodcut" where Luther's message debunks a world authority: "Or perhaps Holbein's cartoon of Luther with the Pope suspended from his nose" (p. 77). The Diet of Worms scene has as its principle aim the achievement of "the maximum in physical enlargement of the action." This enlargement is achieved not only because the "scenes are stamped on a brilliant ground of gold" represented on the gold front cloth with its "bold, joyful representation of the unique gathering." Osborne suggests that the representation of the boldness and joy be "Luther's two-wheeled wagon which brought him to Worms." This article links him to the world and the common people. The scene also achieves enlargement because the rostrum is to be projected into the audience and the members are to enter from the audience. The effect should be "as if everyone watching had their chins resting on the sides of a boxing-ring." The audience becomes part of the original audience and admires the boldness of Luther's triumph while simultaneously understanding possible objections to Luther's position by the authorities. To reinforce the concept of Luther's transcendence, he enters from the stage (pp. 99-100).

After his refusal to recant his position against authority Luther confronts his followers, the peasants. The Knight explains the relationship between the Peasants' Movement and the Diet of Worms, four years before. He explains that part of Luther's appeal to the common man was that Luther's perspiration (as indicative of unelevated humanity) created an irresistible bond between them. The people felt Luther's leadership without understanding him. He aroused them and

became their titular leader: "I wanted to burst my ears with shouting and draw my sword, no, not draw it, I wanted to pluck it as if it were a flower in my blood and plunge it into whatever he would have told me to. . . . If one could only understand him" (p. 105). The Knight continues, with a peasant's corpse in a cart, to explain Luther's betrayal of the common man in terms of a capitalistic system: profit and loss. Luther who so sedulously avoided contact with the world is now responsible for the loss of life of the peasants and also part of the world class that created the darkness he feared. He is immersed in the society as the Knight smears the blood of the corpse over him.

The dispute between Martin and the Knight ends with Martin Luther praying to Christ against the world of the common man where he cannot be transcendent:

Christ! Hear Me! My words pour from Your Body! They deserved their death, these swarming peasants! They kicked against authority, they plundered and bargained and all in Your name! Christ, believe me! . . . (p. 110).

He recites this prayer in front of the Knight who leaves resigned to this capricious way of the world. Martin recovers more of his transcendent state by elevating himself above the world's authority. He is only responsible to God. His marriage and son prevent him from being a Christ; so he seeks to be as close to Christ as a man has been. His prayer presents an image of a man who speaks directly to God--Abraham. He presents himself as Abraham (through a sermon to the audience). The sermon reprises Luther's odyssey for the body of a child because "in the child [he] sought the father." Abraham lives through his son. Therefore, Luther compromises with life through his son. His own body

is butchered by God because he is immersed in the physical world. However, he lives through his son: "If He [God] butchers us, He makes us live (p. 112)."

The last scene in the play finds Luther five years later in the deadly complacent domesticity with his nun, Katherine, and son, and Staupitz as a dinner guest. Ironically, he resides at the cloister, the place of his transcendence. He no longer fasts. His illnesses are more common and the results of physical excesses: gout, piles, ringing in the ears. His view of life seems almost pragmatic:

It's a shame everyone can't marry a nun. . . . Seems to me there are three ways out of despair. One is faith in Christ, the second is to become enraged by the world and make its nose bleed for it, and the third is the love of a woman. Mind you, they don't all necessarily work--at least, only part of the time (p. 116).

He is an influential man of the world who is at the top of his profession. Staupitz defines Martin's manhood only in relation to the society:

When we used to talk together . . . you were a child. . . . Manhood was something you had to be flung into. . . . Everytime you belch now, the world stops what it's doing and listens (p. 118).

In view of the relationship between Martin and the society Staupitz can delineate certain contributions that the audience realizes Luther did not intend. Hayman criticizes that the audience feels "incredulous and bewildered" because the "play as a whole hasn't contained anything to substantiate this dramatically, and Osborne's Luther hasn't established himself as a personality capable of doing what the historical Luther did."¹⁵ This is certainly true; yet, the play's persistent separation

¹⁵ Hayman, John Osborne, p. 60.

between the personal and the historical indicates that Osborne intends to point out the disparity between the two images and the reality of both. The contributions Staupitz assigns to Luther are the ones that history assigns: the unlacing of the German language, the making of Germany and the body of Europe, taking Christ from "the low mumblings and soft voices and jewelled gowns and the tiaras" and putting Him "back where He belongs. In each man's soul" (p. 122). Of all people Staupitz realizes the incongruity he speaks; however, he stresses to Luther that these contributions come from the interaction of men--not only from one man: "Don't--don't believe you, only you are right" (p. 122).

Like all Osborne heroes Luther's complacency in the world of common men, even though he maintains a degree of elevation, is illusory. The action of the last scene, in the Eremitic cloister, begins with a hymn. As one reviewer states: "throughout this drama, music defines the mood."¹⁶ In this last instance, the music and the setting war against the aura of acceptance Luther tries to exude. He cries in his sleep and sometimes awakes shouting "in the devil's own sweat" for someone to get him out--of despair, of this world. He explains to Staupitz that his immersion in the world after the Diet of Worms was occasioned by his inability to hear God, or to be his own God: "I listened for God's voice, but all I could hear was my own." In his recognition that he is not a Christ or even an Abraham, he must accept

¹⁶ Norman Nadel, "Osborne's Overpowering 'Luther'," New York World-Telegram and The Sun, 26 September 1963 in New York Theatre Critics' Review, p. 278.

the world and his manhood. God no longer even talks to him, and he is disturbed by doubts: "Oh, Lord, I believe. I believe. I do believe. Only help my unbelief." The play ends with Luther speaking to his infant son--explaining his defeat and pessimistically auguring the same defeat for his son: "It's hard to accept you're anyone's son, and you're not the father of yourself. So, don't have dreams so soon, my son. They'll be having you soon enough." He recounts his victory as a child at Worms and ends by using Christ's words: "A little while, and you shall see me." However, even this final attempt at elevation is undercut by doubt: "Let's just hope so" (p. 125). Luther exits slowly with the child with no exuberance. Nevertheless, like all Brechtian history, the future (the child) is present even in the past. The final picture of Luther is the synthesis of his greatness and his weakness, his personal life is his social life. "It is as if hero and antihero were revealed in a flash to be one, . . ."¹⁷

Critical consensus proclaims Alfred Redl, the pre-World War I Imperial Army lieutenant, to be so unlike the "usual Osborne hero"¹⁸ that his portrait in A Patriot for Me¹⁹ might be removed from the Osborne gallery of "angry young men" with no ill effect. One critic even

¹⁷Howard Taubman, "Theatre: . . . 'Luther' Stars Albert Finney," New York Times, 26 September 1963 in New York Theatre Critics' Review p. 280.

¹⁸This phrase had become a staple of criticism by 1965. Critics tended to establish the value of an Osborne play according to the rules they believed Osborne himself established.

¹⁹John Osborne, A Patriot for Me in West of Suez, A Patriot for Me, Time Present, The Hotel in Amsterdam: Four Plays by John Osborne (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1973). Subsequent references will be in the text, from this edition.

suggests that the play "is best treated as apocryphal" because of this major defect.²⁰ The evaluations use certain set criteria for the ultimate Osborne hero: he must be articulate (to display the verve of Osborne's language); he must be so critical of the mediocrity of the society that he rebels through self-isolation; he must assail the sensibilities of the audience to "confront . . . like a desperate question."²¹

With these criteria, Redl seems no kin to Jimmy Porter, George Dillon, or Martin Luther. In the Austria-Hungary before World War I, Alfred Redl is a conforming ambitious man. His characterization has no predecessor in Osborne's gallery. Redl is "reticent, constrained, hidden (from himself and others . . .)."²² Despite his conformity in the Army, Redl is unaware, until Act I ends, that he is a homosexual. He does not talk about his feelings and is therefore presented "more through other people's eyes than his own."²³ One critic suggests that a reticent hero belies Osborne's lack of perception into the character as well as lack of dramatic control.²⁴ Another charges that Redl's characterization "takes the wind out of the playwright's syntax."²⁵

²⁰ Mary McCarthy, "Verdict on Osborne," Observer, 4 July 1965, p. 17.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Harold Ferrar, John Osborne (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), p. 36.

²³ Hayman, John Osborne, p. 87.

²⁴ Ferrar, John Osborne, p. 36.

²⁵ Walter Kerr, "Why Has Osborne Taken the Trouble," New York Times, 12 October 1969, in New York Theatre Critics' Review, pp. 247-8.

except for the single moment when the recognizable Osborne "voice" emerges. Redl seems to move toward articulation throughout the play and finally addresses a tirade against his lover. Even this triumphant moment does not satisfy the critics who "hanker" after Osborne's "tirades": "for this effect [Redl's inarticulation] Osborne has to forgo all evening the main pleasure of his talent, the language."²⁶

Redl is the one dead hero in the Osborne gallery besides Coriolanus. His suicide at the end of the play certainly does not reflect the comic impasse in the other plays. His death appears the result of a simple cause-effect: he is a conforming member of the society who discovers his nonconformity (homosexuality) and is blackmailed into counter-espionage (by one faction) and suicide (by the other). The other heroes embrace the society as an inimicable fact of existence; they can defiantly mock what they are really imitating to maintain a vestige of transcendence in a world where it is illusory. Redl seems to bow and obey the dictates of the society; his world seems to triumph. He does not evoke the ambivalent audience response of the other heroes. He seems merely pathetic and essentially "likeable."²⁷ He is not admirable in his unyielding persistence but foolish in his illusions.

Redl's singularity in the Osborne gallery of heroes effects critical rejection of the Brechtian history milieu of the play. Luther is successful in spite of the history because Martin Luther fits the mold

²⁶ Ronald Bryden, The Unfinished Hero and Other Essays (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 84.

²⁷ Hayman, John Osborne, p. 88.

of the "angry young man's" angry young man. "One guessed that Osborne saw in Luther a more effective base-born rebel than any he had known in beards and jeans."²⁸ A Patriot for Me's history is less palatable because of the Redl characterization. With such a non-vital figure the play's history becomes "Viennese operetta minus the music [lyrics]."²⁹ The only aspect of the play that whets the popular and, to a more limited extent, the critical appetite is the homosexuality theme. The normal controversy of this subject in the English theatre of 1965 was intensified when Osborne refused to cut certain scenes by the order of the Lord Chamberlain. Since the play was not licensed for performance in England it was presented before a private audience "only for a limited run in a private club theatre."³⁰ This controversy breeds so much interest in the play that the critical focus is deflected from Redl and the historical frame to the homosexuality. Esslin believed, therefore, that Osborne changes his characteristic heroic voice but does not step off his soapbox:

And yet, when he is dealing with the real subject matter of the play, the problem of the homosexual in present-day English society, Osborne rises to considerable heights of eloquence. His mistake was to try to deal with the subject in a "Brechtian" form.³¹

Mary McCarthy states that with the exception of the drag ball in Act II, Scene 1, everything in the play is "extremely tiresome, banal and pre-

²⁸ McCarthy, "Verdict on Osborne," p. 17.

²⁹ Esslin, Reflections, p. 82.

³⁰ "John Osborne and the Boys at the Ball," p. 5.

³¹ Esslin, Reflections, pp. 82-3.

dictable." Since the homosexuality is the high-point of the play she suggests the "chief merit of the enterprise" is that it gave "work to a large number of homosexual actors or perhaps to normal actors who could 'pass' for homosexuals."³²

A Patriot for Me is a play which synthesizes its hero, setting, themes, and Brechtian techniques into an artistic whole. It is ironic comedy, not pathos or comic opera. Redl is a combatant in essentially the same comic contests (with the same results) as any other Osborne hero. Because one of the comic contests in Osborne's work is man vs. society, A Patriot for Me's milieu is delineated using Brechtian device as well as his concept of history--as in Luther. However, Osborne reverses the focus of the comic contests in A Patriot for Me.

Unlike his other plays, the most ostensive contest in A Patriot for Me is between Redl's personal image and his idealized self-image, while the contest of malcontent and the society is more subtle. Yet, because Redl's transcendence is achieved through his role in, and not without, (his image of) society, the comic contests are perhaps more inextricable than in any other Osborne play.

Alfred Redl's idealized self-image is dependent upon an invalid view of the world. He seeks transcendence in an Austria-Hungary which really does not exist. In 1890 Redl's vision of the world is bound by the competitive discipline of the Imperial Army--which is not a functioning army in that society. Through its ornate spit and polish the Army exudes "elitism." Redl seeks transcendence in the elitist com-

³²McCarthy, "Verdict on Osborne," p. 17.

pany by an extremely rigid focus on the rules and aloofness from the fellowship. His elevation in the society couples "competitive success [in the elitist Army] and seclusion" (p. 117). In the first two scenes of the play, Redl is presented as the ultimate correct, ambitious Army Officer. The emphasis in the scenes, however, is upon the unnaturalness of this stance. Redl's elevation is consciously willed; he cannot accept any other type of behavior as valid for him--even though his actions belie his human, fallible nature.

Both of the first two scenes present Redl in the isolated world of the Imperial Army. In Scene 1 he is a second at a duel for Siczynski who has challenged fellow Officer Kupfer for calling him "Fraülein Rothschild" (p. 83). Kupfer thereby casts aspersions on his Jewish ancestry and his homosexuality. As Redl enters the gymnasium of the 7th Galician Infantry Regiment the accouterments of his transcendent image are recognizable, but "his features can barely be made out." The setting for the duel is replete with rope hangs, vaulting horse, and climbing bars. The duel itself is a model of robot-like precision and ceremony. Redl's image compliments the setting; after his boots are heard, he appears in uniform with "close cropped hair, a taut, compact body . . . long black cheroots. . . . a shabby cigarette case, an elegant amber holder, . . ." (p. 79). In his pre-duel discussion with Siczynski Redl wills aloofness from the emotionalism of the duel. The discussion, instead, focuses upon Redl's non-aristocratic background and his ambition to enter the War College--an elite position within the Army. To achieve this goal he requests extra duties and regulates his life through his hard work: "what else can I do?" (p. 84).

After Siczynski is killed in the duel Redl even retains his composure in front of his fellow officers.

Nevertheless, during the first scene Osborne presents Redl at odds with his well-ordered life. He accepts Siczynski's request to be his second, without consciously understanding why. This acceptance is a break in his resolve of noninvolvement and distrust of his fellow men:

SICZYNSKI: I don't

REDL: On people's goodwill.

SICZYNSKI: I don't. You do.

REDL: I do? No, I don't . . . I try not to. (He is confused for a moment [p. 83].)

He even offers to get Siczynski out of the duel but becomes quite cold and formal when Siczynski refuses. Just before the duel Redl relates his dream to Siczynski. The dream suggests an unconscious awareness of the treachery bred in the competitive spirit of the Army and the ideal but unreal character virtues that Redl believes is the essence of the Army code.

Anyway: I was attending a court martial. Not mine. Someone else's. I don't quite know whose. But a friend of some sort, someone I liked. Someone upright, frank, respected, but upright. It was quite clear from the start what the outcome would be, and I was immediately worrying about having to go and visit him in gaol. And it wasn't just because I knew I would be arrested myself as soon as I got in there. . . . I went and started to talk to him. He didn't say anything. There was just the wire netting between us . . . and then of course, they arrested me. I couldn't tell whether he was pleased or not. Pleased that I'd come to see him or that they'd got me too (pp. 85-6).

When the young man is killed, Redl's resolve crumples after the dueling party leaves. He "wipes the blood from SICZYNSKI's mouth cradling him in his arms" (p. 86). The stage image at the end of the scene presents Redl embracing a world that is quite different from the unemotional,

ceremonious, inflexible Army code.

The Army's code is further delineated in Scene 2. The Commandant of the Regiment, Von Möhl informs Redl of his selection to the War College. During the interview Von Möhl explains the ideals of the Army; Redl's conduct during the scene mirrors these ideals. "REDL speaks coolly and carefully. He is anxious to be courteous and respectful without seeming unctuous, or sound a false, fawning note. He succeeds" (p. 88). As Möhl reads Redl's examination report (26 out of 419) the emphasis is upon his "coolness" under pressure--which is, according to Möhl, the mark of a "fine interpreter of the finest modern military thinking." The "coolness" functions with other qualities: "upright, discreet, frank and open, painstaking, marked ability to anticipate as well as initiate instructions, without being reckless, keen judgment, cool under pressure . . ." (p. 89). One might notice that many of these qualities are mutually exclusive: an upright person rarely needs discretion (which implies moral compromise) and a discrete person is rarely truly frank and open. Also, the qualities which Redl extracts, emphasizes and admires in the code are the inflexible ones: "upright, frank, respected, but upright" (p. 85). The personality qualities mentioned in the report also have a hierarchy of value to Redl: "friendly, but unassertive, dignified and strikes everyone as the type of gentleman and distinguished officer of the Royal and Imperial Army" (p. 89). Redl's conduct emphasizes the dignity and the unassertiveness and the lack of involvement that Möhl suggests for the future. Like Luther, Redl goes beyond a code to gain transcendence over those who already are elite through isolation in the society. The only mo-

ment in the scene in which Redl is not in conscious control is in his treacherous evaluation of Siczynski: "I hardly knew him, sir. . . . He struck me as being hypercritical, oversceptical about things" (p. 90). He does not denounce the dead man's homosexuality. He thereby becomes analogous to the "friend" in the dream who tricks the upright man; for Siczynski follows the code of the Army to the letter--essentially. However, Siczynski is denounced by Möhl because he steps out of line in the appearance of the officer. An officer must be popular, like Redl, but yet uninvolved. He may have women and debts as long as he seeks succor from the Army.

Oh, one expects all young officers to have debts. It's always been so, and always will, till they pay soldiers properly. Every other week, a fund has to be raised for this one or that. Fine. But this officer had, or so it seems, and frankly it doesn't surprise me, no friends, was in the hands of moneylenders, of his own race, naturally, and why? Women? Of course, one asks. But who? No one knows (pp. 90-1).

The reasoning is specious. Möhl condemns Siczynski as much for his "discretion" as for his uprightness in fighting. Because his failure to confide in the Army casts doubt and mysterious shadows over his character, he cannot possess the Army's precious respectability. The code is less essence than artifice; "aptitudes at the expense of character" (p. 107). Appearance or respectability is more important to Redl the "upright man" than the reality of the conscience when he is confronted by his superior.

Redl's self-image is that of the ideal, righteous, Army man who can somehow rise through the ranks untainted by emotion or moral compromise or human alliance. The first two scenes present the impossibility of this stance. Redl's vision of the Army society is inaccu-

rate; it allows no flexibility or compromise--which even the Army code allows. Redl's singularity permits no real relationship to his fellow officers although his ambition demands their approbation. Redl transcends when he is most constrained and isolated from even the "normal" pursuits of the elitist Army. When he is unconscious (dreaming) or in incomplete control of himself he recognizes the invalidity of his transcendent vision; but he does not accept it. The movement of this play, and all of Osborne's plays, is toward Redl's acceptance of the world as it exists. However, he joins the Osborne gallery in his inability to forgive the world vision. His suicide is little different from the death-to-the-self life of Luther, Paul Slickey, George Dillon, Archie Rice, and Jimmy Porter.

Recognition or discovery must precede acceptance. The world vision that Redl must come to recognize is not merely his own homosexual world, but the society at large. Osborne states that he "'had for years been wanting to write a play about homosexuality and the whole ambiguity of it!'" But he did not write the play until the "'theatrically fascinating'" background could be united to the homosexuality: "'then the two things--the homosexuality and the period came together. Suddenly it made sense.'"³³ Redl discovers his own homosexuality by the end of the first act. So that mystery is not the essence of the play. The homosexual world mirrors the society not because the society causes the homosexuality nor because everyone is homosexual in the society but because even the homosexual world shares in the pettiness,

³³"John Osborne and the Boys at the Ball," p. 5.

and emptiness of the Empire while simultaneously trying to "kick over the traces."

Osborne's presentation of Redl's homosexuality seems complete with the obvious "red-plush ironies"³⁴ that most works on homosexuality present. These ironies seem to be "salutary shocks based on the contrast between reality and appearance."³⁵ Yet, in fairness to Osborne one must concede that the ironies are so obvious because so many of the audience and critics viewing the play were aware of Redl's homosexuality before the play even begins. Perhaps, Osborne's publicity hunger backfires--this time. Even though the homosexuality would provide the electric theatre that Osborne seeks--the "thrills" are not gratuitous. Alfred Redl's real homosexuality bears the same relationship to his transcendent self-image as Jimmy Porter's needs and anger, Luther's historical image and his isolated transcendent self.

Osborne does not present homosexuality as impotence, the opposite of power.³⁶ Instead, the homosexual world is the opposite of Redl's ideal vision of the Imperial Army. For Redl, it is a world where physical obsession or need negates the intellect, dependency negates singularity, and tumult negates the tranquility of the code. The ambiguity of homosexuality in A Patriot for Me is just this synthesis of

³⁴Kerr, "Why Has Osborne Taken the Trouble?," p. 247.

³⁵McCarthy, "Verdict on Osborne," p. 17.

³⁶Ferrar implies this meaning of the term in his assertion that "homosexuality and power are as symbiotically inseparable here as propriety and pornography in Victorian England." John Osborne, p. 36.

opposites. In most of the remaining eight scenes of Act I Redl takes his private transcendent image into the world. In Scene 3 Redl visits one of the soldiers' favorite private "clubs" with a fellow soldier also promoted to the War College, Taussig. Redl does not often visit this place; he also has open disdain for one of the most attractive and popular of the girls ("Garbage often is" [p. 93]) and refuses to avail himself of her services ("Please forget it. I'm bored with the place" [p. 94]). He only finally accepts when Taussig insists that he has arranged everything. Redl's image in the scene is more the aloof officer than the homosexual. The final stage directions juxtapose his Army image with an image of the world: he "fastens his tunic smartly and steps through the curtain into the tumult" (p. 96).

Scene 4 takes place in Hilde's room where Redl has almost fainted. In this private scene with Hilde Redl shows no interest in her until she begins to compare his aloofness to Lt. Siczynski; he then kisses her and comments on her beauty--the "garbage" of the previous scene. When she suggests that he's joined the Army because he has no friends and believes that "Love's hardly ever possible" Redl retorts that he is in the Army because it mirrors his self-image: "I'm in the army because it suits me and I'm suited to it. I can make my own future. I can style it my own way." Both scenes suggest Redl's homosexual proclivities--sometimes with obvious stereotyped hints: his constant preference for peppermints over cigars, the beauty of his mouth, his rationalization that "there are always too many babies being born." However, the thrust of both scenes, public and private, is Redl's conscious transcendent stance. He maintains his image even after he

learns from Hilde that soldiers commonly retire with Albrecht the waiter--"He always gets the pick, . . . Anything he wants. Anyone" (p. 99).

In Scene 6 Redl is attending the Royal Ball at the Emperor's residence. In the company of Colonel Mohl and other elite of the society Redl articulates his image of the Army and his superior position in it (he is now a Captain). He agrees with Möhl that the "army creates an elite" (p. 107), but disagrees that the army creates "a proper bond, . . . [that's] human" between the diversity of men. Redl insists on singularity, even though he is no aristocrat (this only increases his elevation):

I don't agree that all men are brothers, like Colonel Möhl. We are clearly not. Nor should be, or ever want to be. . . . We're meant to clash. And often and violently. I am proud to be despised by some men, no perhaps most men. Others are to be tolerated or ignored (p. 109).

Colonel Möhl also recognizes Redl's elevation in his elitist organization: "the army is still a place of privilege. Redl is the rare type that redeems that privilege . . . he overpowers it, . . . [by] natural, disciplined character, ability and honour" (p. 110). Möhl further informs the Countess Delyanoff that now Redl is ready for marriage because marriage in that society is as ordered as the Army. Therefore, the rigidity of Redl's character would make him "a first-class husband"--he is "steadfast, sober, industrious, orderly, he likes orderly things, hates chaos" (p. 111).

Scene 7 juxtaposes Redl's conscious transcendence with his unconscious fallible humanity and homosexuality. The scene begins with Redl's "sharp, clear, moaning cry" (p. 112). He enters the Countess's

boudoir to the drawing room for a precipitate return to his quarters. He is crying from an incessant dream. Redl explains to the Countess, who has been his lover, that the dreams not only occur at night but also "when [he's] having to force [himself] to do something as an exercise, or a duty, like working late" (p. 116). His uncertainty is related to his transcendent image; when he's immersed in his Army role he senses his human limitation.

I feel myself, almost as if I were falling away and disappearing. I want to run. . . . But, I've felt I should take a serious, applied interest in this sort, in, ours is a complicated age, and I'm some small part of it, and I should devote as much attention and interest to it as I can muster (p. 116).

Osborne relates Redl's misgivings about his self-image with his physical rejection of the Countess who is more acceptable to Redl than Hilde because of her title. Redl's rejection is both conscious and unconscious. In the beginning of the scene, while Redl is still in the throes of his dream he admits his lack of control (homosexuality) over his rejection of the Countess: "You're--you're easily the most beautiful . . . desirable woman I've ever . . . There couldn't be. . . . Sophia: it's me. It's like a disease" (p. 114). But after the Countess points out the irrationality of his explanation Redl retreats to his transcendence. He repulses her warning about excessive drinking-- "I've told you. I drink. I drink, heavily sometimes, I don't get drunk" (p. 114). He rejects her protection--"I can protect myself" (p. 115). He counters all her inquiries about the idiosyncrasies of their lovemaking (the lack of lights, his refusal to kiss her) and finally proclaims that whatever she wants from him he "can't and won't" (p. 117) give. This declaration adumbrates the synthesis of

his ideal self-image with its opposite.

The synthesis is not complete until the drag ball which opens Act II; for Redl's synthesis of opposites finally move to conscious levels. The scene immediately preceeding the ball, Scene 10 of Act I, finally presents Redl's acceptance of his homosexuality--but it only suggests his unyielding persistence in maintaining his transcendent ideal. In Scene 10 Redl is found in bed with a young soldier, Paul. Four other young soldiers enter and rob and beat Redl. Paul exits with them after justifying the normalcy of the situation: "Don't be too upset, love. You'll get used to it" (p. 124). Before the conflagration Osborne writes the scene with rather obvious reversals which focus on the "hints" that have been given throughout Act I. (Again, it must be remembered that perhaps the obviousness is apparent only in retrospect --after knowing that this is a "homosexual" play.) Now it is Redl who prefers looking at his partner in the light, who is filled with doubt about his physical desirability, who questions Paul's early return to the barracks. The suggestion of his inner resistance to his situation is presented when Redl, "who knows instantly what will happen" when the four men enter "AMAZE" them by his "vicious defense of himself, which is like an attack." At the end of the scene, Redl is "a kicked, bloody heap" but not really immersed into the chaos of the society. He may accept its rules, but he refuses to abide by them (pp. 123-4).

The nature of this comic impasse is fully presented at the 1902 Drag Ball. Colonel Redl arrives at the costume ball in his uniform with its decorations. His refusal to "dress-up" is contrasted to both Steinbauer and Kupfer who are costumed. Both of these men were duelists in

Scene 1. They represent the flexibility of the Army that Redl rejects. At the beginning of the ball Redl is "quite cool . . . staring very carefully around at all the guests, his eye missing no one" (p. 127). His icy isolation melts when he sees Steinbauer who mentions the duel. Redl seems to immerse himself into the company with the "sudden gratitude for the remembrance." However, Osborne also stresses the "weariness, sadness" (p. 129) which accompanies his joining the company of the ball. This reaction is similar to that of the other Osborne heroes (from George Dillon to Luther) when recognizing the illusory nature of their transcendence. During much of the scene Redl yields himself to the company of the revellers at the ball: "He is drinking freely now, and is excited and enjoying himself" (p. 130). The host of the ball, the Baron, believes that "[h]e's just being himself for once" (p. 136). However, Redl is not only homosexual; that part of his reality is fused to his transcendent self-image. While watching the Army's Kupfer cavort with the waiter-in-drag, Albrecht, Redl suddenly "becomes hostile: to KUPFER, drunkenness and himself. . . . [he] sobers up and stiffens" (p. 138). With this change in his demeanor he rejects the community at the ball ("Us? Speak for yourself" p. 140) and leaves after striking his playmate of the evening, Ferdy, so hard that he falls into the other guests. Ferdy's transgression seems to be his longing for attention from the general company.

Redl's espionage is thematically presented as the logical result of the synthesis of his opposing realities. Because he is unable to accept exposure and reject his Army transcendence, Redl is blackmailed into espionage. Yet, his image is not that of the man who is not in

control of his destiny. Redl manages to maintain his transcendent image, now as an officer in the Austrian Chief of Staff's Counter Espionage Department, while really accepting its illusory nature. One of his blackmailers recognizes his distinction--"If you ever do feel any shame for what you are, you don't accept it like a simpleton, you heave it off, like a horse that's fallen on you. . . . the result is . . . that splendid Viennese style" (p. 148). Redl's recognition of the disparity between his transcendent stance and his espionage is not accompanied by the same sadness as his knowledge of his homosexuality. At least espionage is still part of the general "game" of the Army; the only "game" he chooses to be fit for.

Carter suggests that Redl's espionage results from his permitting "his desire and true nature to emerge and to determine the course of his life." Because of this passivity Carter seems to regard Redl as a victim of some fate.

He is perfectly aware that his deal with the Russians will eventually be discovered, but he is helpless to prevent the inevitability of this discovery. He accepts his fate knowing that society will not grant him happiness in any case.³⁷

This image of Redl runs counter to that presented in the scene. Redl is not brought to his knees in the scene, nor does he portray a lack of spunk. Redl laughs sardonically at the incongruity of his position but revels in his singularity and vitality. For Redl is chosen for the espionage because of his refusal to really immerse himself in either world (homosexuality and the merely elite Army) of Kupfer, Steinbauer

³⁷ Carter, John Osborne, p. 94.

and others. His unyielding indiscretions cause his choice by the enemy and his final discovery by Möhl. Redl is tragic in spirit not in situation. The fact that so many other Army officers are homosexual indicates that Redl's final "destiny" is not inevitable--it is chosen. The choice is not simply between "being a patriot to his society or patriot to himself." with Redl choosing himself.³⁸ Redl's choice of espionage is Redl's choice of a transcendence which he realizes is illusory.

Act III presents the moments in the play when Redl seems most articulate. However, while Redl's tirades articulate the superiority he feels they simultaneously mirror his immersion in the homosexual world because they are tirades and therefore without the intellectual control and reticence he wills. Again, the synthesis. The first tirade is addressed to the Countess who has married Redl's lover. Redl's charges against her illustrate his elevated self-image; she's a Jew, a whore, and a spy. But they also establish his superiority in the homosexual world: "I tell you this: you'll never know that body like I know it" (p. 152). At the height of his elevation he tries to compromise, but Sophia will not agree. After ordering her out, he regains control by accepting Kupfer as his new boarder. However, the scene ends with his rejection of blackmailing or prosecuting the Countess for her espionage and with his "little moaning noises" (p. 154) in his sleep. He cannot emotionally accept his homosexuality enough to jealously vindicate himself against the Countess--he believes that one can "discipline"

³⁸ Ibid., p. 97.

oneself against jealousy as one masters a foreign language. His homosexuality can be controlled by his will--but not in his sleep.

In his tirade against Viktor, his lover who now wants to marry, Redl again fuses his realities. He lambastes Viktor because of his false avaricious values while eloquently expressing his need for the boy. Redl recognizes the boy's comparative decadence using his transcendent elitist values: "You've no memory, no grace, you keep nothing." Nevertheless, he also recognizes the boy's beauty and youth as he "takes the boy's head in his arms" (pp. 164-5). His homosexuality now seems out of his power to really control. In these scenes before Redl's suicide, Osborne focuses upon the ambivalence of Redl's reality.

Finally, Redl's counter espionage is discovered by Möhl. When confronted with the evidence Redl does not even try to justify himself or make a "deal". Instead he delivers a diatribe against the Spanish and their role in the Hapsburg society. He maintains his transcendent image until the offstage shot is heard. He is finally seen studying a Browning pistol manual--using the traits developed in the elitist Army. Redl's final action on May 29, 1913 makes him the Patriot for Me of the title. For Osborne this phrase implies more than just personal satisfaction. In an interview with Kenneth Tynan Osborne uses the phrase to intertwine a man's private and public image:

Tynan: "Are you a patriot?"

Osborne: "A patriot for whom: A patriot for me, I suppose. . . .
Yes, I'm a patriot in the sense that my life only has
meaning here, not somewhere else."³⁹

³⁹"Osborne and Tynan on Life," p. 5.

Redl's suicide is a recognition of his two realities: the one derived from the fixed values of the Army and the one derived from the chaos and tumult of the society. Both of these worlds produced Redl. Redl only affirms the transcendent vision; his suicide is a marvel of singular Army precision. Yet, while he affirms his transcendence, the society that produced a Redl is presented as maintained by men like Redl. Its impermanence is suggested by Redl's suicide in its name as well as his homosexuality. Even the other Army officers are not presented with their lives inextricably fused to the elitist society that the Imperial Army serves. Many are either homosexual or very flexible and discreet in their application of the Army code. Möhl is concerned less with the breaking of the code than with reputations. In the penultimate scene the Deputies and Ministers of state consider Redl's suicide and espionage the result of laxity of standards. Actually the "rigid standards" of Redl's image of society caused the espionage. Consequently, Redl the cause célèbre of one of the most famous scandals in Central Europe⁴⁰ is not, like Luther, equal to his historical image.

The Brechtian nature of the historical presentation in A Patriot for Me is mirrored by Redl's ambivalence. Osborne presents the society in terms of the dialectical material which is reflected in Redl's comic contests. The fixed, certain world of the Empire encompasses its opposites--the homosexual and espionage worlds. With the suicide of the ultimate Imperial Army man, the demise of the Empire is suggested--

⁴⁰"John Osborne and the Boys at the Ball," p. 5.

because it can no longer function purely; it must embrace its opposites. Redl's final tirade states that the Hapsburg Empire now smells of death because of the Spanish--even though they are Catholics. However, throughout the play Osborne has presented the death of the Empire--ironically because of the same characteristics which compose Redl's transcendent self-image: Elitist pride in Catholicism, Race and Country--

Still, all we do is celebrate and congratulate ourselves on saving Europe from the infidel (p. 104).

I see nothing about the eighteenth century that makes me believe the nineteenth was any better. And what makes you think that the twentieth will be an improvement (p. 107)?

Bourgeois Monetary Values in the guise of aristocratic virtue (Redl is "discovered" both by the Tsarist Russians and Möhl through his lack of discretion, especially in spending.)--

The Viennese gull themselves they're gay, but they're just stiff-jointed aristocrats like puppets, grubbing little tradesmen or Jews and chambermaids making a lot of one-two-three noises all the time. Secretly, they're feeling utterly thwarted and empty (p. 132).

Inflexibility and certainty--

No one is interested in doubts. This is an age of iron certainties, that's what they want to know about, run by money makers, large armies, munitions men, money makers for money makers (p. 154).

Subordination of man's pleasure to the principles of the church (morality) and the State (responsibility). Homosexuality is an aberration--

The evasion, naturally, of responsibility . . . For instance in enjoying the physical sensations of the body without any reference to the responsibilities involved in the relationship. Or, indeed, to society or any beliefs, such as belief in God (pp. 143-4).

(The doctor who expresses this view is another subject of the Russian's

scrutiny and inquiry after Redl's suicide.)

The homosexual world presents one of man's attempts to live in this structured society. This world is most intensely presented at the drag ball. Osborne states that he began the entire play with this stage image.

"I wanted to do a play in which there would be an absolutely ambiguous scene--terribly baroque, with everyone on the stage looking marvelous. And for as long as possible the audience musn't know what is really going on--that, in fact, they are seeing a drag ball."⁴¹

The drag ball is presented as a parody of that Royal Ball at which Redl articulates his transcendent elitism. At the drag ball the Baron explains why all the prominent persons risk exposure. Homosexuality is an outlet from the Hapsburg imperialism:

This--is the celebration of the individual against the rest, the us's and them's, the free and the constricted, the gay and the dreary, the lonely and the mob, the little Tsarina [in drag] there and the Emperor Francis Joseph (p. 131).

However, the play indicates that the "deviant" society is really part of the majority. During the ball Osborne indicates that there are the same class divisions, anti-Semitism, and snobbishness. The material imperative is also presented with the constant money-grubbing and "blackmail" in the homosexual relationships. The real world is a fusion of opposites--neither of which is inevitable. Osborne presents homosexuality as not inevitable. It is no deviant conduct of mankind but of the Austrian Hungarian society that denies man's vitality. Osborne suggests that this society is maintained by men and is capable of

⁴¹Ibid.

being changed by them.

The production of A Patriot for Me is actually more Brechtian than Luther because of the distancing of the audience. Ostensively there are few presentational devices in the play: music is used realistically since many scenes are set in various and sundry places of entertainment. The scenery and costumes are also representational. Even the lantern slides tend to be representational; they are used when the Russian agents launch inquiries into their victims and when the death is reported to the Deputies and Minister. However, the audience of A Patriot for Me remains more distanced than in any other Osborne play. Because Osborne's controversial subject is quite capable of eliciting an emotional response without his usual devices, he tempers the audience's emotional overreaction with intellectual lucidity. This detached reaction is effected by the historical nature of the plot itself, and the presentation of the scenes. The historical setting distances the audience because they know of the demise of the Empire. While Redl exalts in the certainty, the audience recognizes the impermanence. Some critics complain about the twenty episodic, jerky vignettes of the play.⁴² This effect was intentional. Osborne insists that "the material demanded that sort of approach"--"very short, sharp, swift way."

"It was also the first time I'd ever tackled anything which had the elements of a thriller. I had a clear narrative and certain facts

⁴²"Viennese Drag," Time, 17 October 1969, p. 71 and Martin Gottfried, "'A Patriot For Me'," Women's Wear Daily, 6 October 1969 in New York Theatre Critics' Review, p. 245.

to put over, which I don't usually have to bother with. That makes for a certain distance perhaps."⁴³

Osborne presents the play as a thriller to focus upon the action and not solely upon the homosexuality. A thriller requires the workings of the mind--ratiocination, not emotions. The jerky pacing focuses attention upon flux and contingency and evitability of the action. The causality of tragedy is missing. Finally, the sense of impermanence and evitability in Redl's situation ironically effects a sympathy for him which eradicates any alienation because of his homosexuality. The emotional distancing puts Redl into perspective as one of the Osborne heroes that we pity for the loss of an ideal vision as we admire his refusal to totally accept the loss.

Both Brecht and Osborne have adopted Shakespeare's Coriolanus. Brecht's Coriolanus is an unfinished translation and adaptation written between 1951-3 for performance by the Berliner Ensemble. Although he died before the completion of the project, the extant English translation follows his lengthy scenario except for a major "gap" in Scene 3 of Act I. "Brecht intended to combine Shakespeare's Scenes 4-10 into a big battle scene." However, with his death the translator simply added Shakespeare's scenes with a modification of the linguistic style.⁴⁴ Osborne's A Place Calling Itself Rome is his latest (1973)

⁴³"John Osborne and the Boys at the Ball," p. 5.

⁴⁴Bertolt Brecht, Coriolanus, in Bertolt Brecht, Collected Plays, Vol. IX: Adaptations: The Tutor, Coriolanus, The Trial of Joan of Arc at Rouen, 1431, Don Juan, Trumpets and Drums, trans. by Ralph Manheim, Vintage Books (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 70. Subsequent references to the play will appear in the text.

play; it has not yet been produced on the stage.⁴⁵ The differences between the two adaptations elucidate, perhaps better than other possible analysis, the Brechtian techniques that Osborne has adapted.⁴⁶

Although it is most probable that Osborne's work is merely parallel to Brecht's--the English translation is quite recent--the selection of the subject itself may have been influenced by the Berliner Ensemble's second London season in 1965. The Ensemble's selections included Brecht's Coriolanus in German.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, even without direct influence Coriolanus presents Osborne and Brecht with a subject matter that compliments that of their earlier work. Brecht believes that the story itself provided both entertainment and the dialectic material.

We want to have and to communicate the fun of dealing with a slice of illuminated history. And to have first hand experience of dialectics. . . . Even with popular ballads or the peepshows at fairs the simple people (who are so far from simple) love stories of the rise and fall of great men, of eternal change, of the ingenuity of the oppressed, of the potentialities of mankind. And they hunt for the truth that is "behind it all."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ John Osborne, A Place Calling Itself Rome (London: Faber and Faber, 1973). Subsequent references to this play will appear in the text.

⁴⁶ Because this analysis of the adaptations of Coriolanus by Brecht and Osborne will clarify Osborne's adaptation of Brecht I have extended the scope of the dissertation to include this adaptation by Osborne although the other two adaptations, A Bond Honoured (from a Lope de Vega play) and Hedda Gabler (from the Ibsen play) will not be included.

⁴⁷ Esslin, Reflections, pp. 80-1.

⁴⁸ Brecht, "Study of the first scene of Shakespeare's Coriolanus," in "Brecht's Notes," Bertolt Brecht, Collected Plays, Vol. IX: Adaptations: The Tutor, Coriolanus, The Trial of Joan of Arc at Rouen, 1431, Don Juan, Trumpets and Drums, ed. Ralph Manheim and John Willett, Vintage Books (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 394. Here in after referred to as "Brecht's Notes."

The dialectic would be between the appearance or the historically accepted image and the reality that Brecht perceives in the situation. Brecht regarded Coriolanus as a tragedy of pride for Coriolanus and a potential tragedy of Rome, especially of the plebs.

There is no need to ignore "the tragedy of pride," or for that matter to play it down; . . . We can accept the fact that Coriolanus finds it worthwhile to give his pride so much rein that death and collapse "just don't count." But ultimately society pays, Rome pays also, and it too comes close to collapsing as a result.⁴⁹

Brecht's aim in adapting the play was, consequently, to amend the lack of self-awareness in the masses and heighten their sense of history--that no thing or event is inevitable.⁵⁰ Brecht takes the situation of the play, the irreconcilable conflict between Coriolanus and the crowd he hates, and tips the balance toward the crowd. In Brecht's adaptation the characteristic pride of the hero is important to the crowd only because Coriolanus believes he is indispensable. Brecht states that this is a belief to which the crowd "cannot succumb without running the risk of collapse. Thereby it is brought into irreconcilable conflict with this hero, and the kind of acting must be such as not only to permit this but to compel it." Brecht's adaptation will not merely allow the empathy which he sees as part of "enjoying the hero and the tragic element"; the audience must also be enlightened intel-

⁴⁹ Brecht, "Enjoying the hero," in "Brecht's Notes," p. 374.

⁵⁰ Ralph Manheim and John Willett, ed., "Editorial Notes--Adapting Shakespeare," in Bertolt Brecht, Collected Plays, Vol IX: Adaptations: The Tutor, Coriolanus, The Trial of Joan of Arc at Rouen, 1431, Don Juan, Trumpets and Drums, Vintage Books (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 395.

lectually about the tragedy, or near tragedy, of Rome. To Brecht this is "a richer form of entertainment."⁵¹

Ironically, there are very few obvious alienation devices in the play. Brecht believed Shakespeare's historical stage was already presentational; also, later in his career Brecht had returned to the "orthodox theatre."⁵² Perhaps, audiences began to expect the more obvious devices of the A-effect in a Brecht production and were emotionally overriding them. This may explain Brecht's mercurial popularity in England. The English were anti-Brecht as long as they understood the words of the play; they seemed to be angered by the Communist tendencies. However, they admired his "precision, passion, acrobatic prowess, and general excellence" of the production--when the alienation devices were the focal points instead of the German, untranslated dialogue. Esslin explains the phenomenon in his "verdict and final summing up of Brecht himself in England": "if he is only seen without his words being heard, he is successful; if his texts are understood he is a total failure."⁵³ In Coriolanus Brecht's A-effect subverts the usual tragic response by presenting Coriolanus as static while showing the development of the society. The dialectic is not between the historical and private image of Coriolanus, as it is in Osborne, but between the historical and real image of the society. This switch in the usual

⁵¹ Brecht, "Plan of the play," in "Brecht's Notes," p. 375.

⁵² John Willett, The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht: A Study From Eight Aspects, A New Directions Book (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1968), p. 123.

⁵³ Esslin, Reflections, pp. 80-1.

focus of a play entitled Coriolanus is the chief alienation device in the adaptation. One must understand the words as well as see the action to experience this play. Therefore, although the play opens, as in Shakespeare,⁵⁴ with a scene between citizens discussing the conditions of the society--Brecht's initial scene focuses on "the unity of opposites. . . . between Menenius Agrippa's phony ideological attempt to unify patricians and plebeians, and their real unification as a result of the war"⁵⁵--instead of focusing on the balance between Coriolanus's view of the citizens and their view of him. "The first thing shown is a civil war. That's something too interesting to be mere background preparation for the entrance of the hero."⁵⁶ From the very beginning, Brecht alienates the audience from their tragic response by eliminating focus on the tragic hero. As he does this, the spirit of the hero is almost incidental to the spirit of the society. Tragedy is adapted to comedy.

Osborne also perceives the play as essentially "about public feeling." However, he realizes as early as 1968 that this was not his main interest:

Tynan: "Last year you were working on a modern version of Coriolanus, set in an African republic. What happened to that?"

⁵⁴ William Shakespeare, Coriolanus, in The Complete Works, general ed. Alfred Harbage, ed. Harry Levin, Pelican Text Revised (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books Inc., 1969). Subsequent references to this play will appear in the text.

⁵⁵ Brecht, "Four Short Notes," in "Brecht's Notes," p. 377.

⁵⁶ Brecht, "Study of the first scene of Shakespeare's Coriolanus," in "Brecht's Notes," p. 378.

Osborne: "I got a bit discouraged about it. I didn't know whether I wanted to write a play about public feeling when all my instincts were focusing down on interior things and people's inner self."⁵⁷

Consequently, Osborne's dialectic in A Place Calling Itself Rome is between Coriolanus and the society and Coriolanus and himself. Coriolanus joins Luther and Redl in his inability to extricate himself from his society that is so tumultuous that it debases the individual. Osborne's Coriolanus cannot exist without the society; his image does not allow him to have a personal reality apart from his societal or public image. Unlike, both Shakespeare and Brecht, Osborne presents his Coriolanus with a conscious image or mask. So that the play also examines the dialectic within his own identity--until the final synthesis of the appearance and the reality. Osborne also adapts ironic comedy from tragedy.

Yet, the most ostensive difference in the two adaptations is the productions. In contrast to Brecht's substantive A-effect, Osborne's alienation is both external and internal. Ironically, a play with the titular emphasis upon Roman society opens with the most private of scenes--a bedroom, a man and wife, a diary, a dream. In a parallel method to Brecht, Osborne alienates his audience from their expected focus--the hero, instead of the society. Like Brecht, Osborne also retains most of the presentational Shakespearean historical devices--the scenes, the non-representational or naturalistic battle and settings. However, Osborne goes beyond Brecht and Shakespeare with such devices as bang-on lighting, characters or actors communicating directly to the

⁵⁷"Osborne and Tynan on Life," p. 4.

audience, and such anachronistic elements as airports, paratroopers, placards from the English society's revolution in 1968, and language that is full of slang, colloquialisms and obscenity. The play seems to be simultaneously set in Rome and England. This "homey" presentation is part of Osborne's need to make the audience feel. For Osborne emulates Brecht's desire to use history as a mirror of the present. However, the English audience's familiarity with Shakespeare would not elicit this response--nor would an African setting or even a totally Roman setting. Osborne sees the Coriolanus situation as a continuous one--but not inevitably so: "'And the awful thing is that it acts itself out every day.'"⁵⁸ His English audience must realize the possibility and reality of this situation as their situation.

Brecht's society in Coriolanus is unified, yet factious. All citizens are unified against the Volscians, but there is fragmentation between the patricians and the plebs. The basic image of the patricians is that of Menenius who is characterized by phony ideology and hypocrisy; he only reveals his true disdain for the tribunes of the plebs when Coriolanus is to be elected consul. However, the plebs and the tribunes are the main focus of the play. In the first scene they are irresolute in pushing their demand for grain and price controls. Yet Brecht "tempers" their image of inferiority to Coriolanus by emphasizing their real hunger (a man with a hungry child is invented) and having Coriolanus enter with an armed guard. Menenius believes that it is this army which has stopped their demands (not his parable).

⁵⁸
Ibid.

Though to be sure, it was not
The sword of my voice but rather the voice of your sword
That toppled them (p. 64).

The people are almost bound by an economic and military prison--as are those in Mother Courage and The Good Woman of Setzuan, and Galileo.

After the tribunes are elected and applauded, the people's demands are still quieted as war looms with terror for all Romans. The tribunes are characterized as true spokesmen of the people in Brecht. One regards the unity of the people under Coriolanus for the war as greater danger than war because the people's demands will not be answered: "I heard him speak. A man like him's a greater/Danger to Rome than to the Volscians." The other expresses the ambivalence of the people and their unwillingness to condemn Coriolanus: "I don't believe that. The valor of his arm/Outweighs his vices and makes good their harm" (p. 67). In Brecht the society of plebs are not as negative in their opinion of Coriolanus as they are in Shakespeare: "He's a very dog to the commonality" (l. 1. 25-6). (Although Shakespeare's plebs too, recognize his services to his country.) The result of this change in focus is Brecht's image of the plebs as culpably naive--but not foolish. They are more concerned with food than images and reputations.

The unity of the plebs in the war is connected to their search for grain as well as their recognition of their need for Coriolanus as leader. Brecht's citizens, unlike Shakespeare's, leave Act I, scene 1 to become valiant soldiers. Instead of Shakespeare's almost Falstaffian portrayal of the soldiers in war, Brecht merely focuses upon their sensibility: they do not follow Coriolanus to the gates of Coriole ("the man's insane; not I,"[p. 72]); they loot the enemy because of

their poverty. They finally praise Coriolanus' valor.

Brecht essentially follow Shakespeare's presentation of Coriolanus in front of the citizens after the battles. In both versions the citizens are quite reasonable in relation to Coriolanus' inflexibility. The accusation against Coriolanus--that he does not love the people--comes not as a result of a vested interest plot of the tribunes but from the questioning of the citizens themselves. When Coriolanus is labelled a traitor because of his indictment of the "unreasoning mob" (p. 102) the charge is not seen as false. He has merely reacted unreasonably to a question about the spoils and further announces the repeal of the tribunes, the people's voice, with the "peace." Again Brecht focuses upon materialistic concerns, not the clash of personalities. The tribune's concern in demanding exile is still in the interest of the people:

Seize the viper
Who's ready to depopulate a city
To be its one and all (p. 104).

After the exile of Coriolanus with the unified applause of the people, Brecht focuses upon their changing, evitable world--where Coriolanus is not indispensable. In his scene of the meeting of a Roman and a Volsce he intersperses many common details with the discussion of the banishment--"You'll see. Hasn't changed much. People eat, sleep and pay taxes" (p. 119). Life goes on. The tribunes reiterate this message at the Forum.

SICINIUS

We've made his friends in the senate blush, to see
The world goes on without the hero.

The state, however

Endures, and even if he hated it far more
Would still endure (p. 125).

Even when news of the Coriolanus--Volsce alliance comes to the tribunes, Sicinius affirms the decision to banish the hero--although the citizens are afraid without their war-lord and arms: "I'd rather have/A sword to show than courage" (p. 130). After the patricians' fears of Menenius' failure to persuade Coriolanus are confirmed, the citizens (with a minority of the patricians) prepare to live and defend their own city. Brutus, their spokesman of Coriolanus' military value, states "If the people who live off Rome won't defend it, then we, whom Rome has lived off up to now, will defend it. Why shouldn't masons defend their walls?" (p. 137). Brutus' change of perspective reflects the final union of the citizens against the hero for the country:

I have the feeling, shared, I'm told by many
Others, that Rome's a better place
With that man gone, a city worth defending,
Perhaps for the first time since it was founded (p. 138).

Rome is a place of infinite possibilities. This concept of the changing nature is expressed in Brutus' speech after Coriolanus' retreat: "The stone has moved. The people takes/Up weapons, and the old earth shakes" (p. 143). The presence of the new society of citizens of all ranks is highlighted in the final scene. Instead of the Shakespearian ending with the death march and the bearing of Coriolanus' body, Brecht's final scene affirms the life that continues. It is Brutus who delivers the final proclamation of the society's victory--since it was he that represented the disunified, frightened, dependent faction of the citizens:

MENENIUS

He's dead now, therefore let his name
 So great before misfortune fell upon
 It be enscribed in the Capitol
 As that of a Roman and a . . .

BRUTUS

Motion: let the state proceed
 With current business.

CONSUL

Question:
 His family has petitioned that its women
 As stipulated in the law of Numa
 Pompilius concerning the survivors
 Of fathers, sons and brothers, be permitted
 To wear mourning in public for ten months

BRUTUS

Rejected (p. 146).

Brecht's presentation of the Roman society as essentially reasonable and well-meaning casts the spirit of Coriolanus in a shadow. He seems almost a "stick" figure in his inflexibility. His virtues seem less admirable than ludicrous. His elevation, his irreplaceability, and his image of the citizens are all illusory. His lack of a hypocritical mask is admirable in Shakespeare's play because of the hypocrisy of the tribunes and confusion and emotionalism of the citizens:

His nature is too noble for the world.
 He would not flatter Neptune for his trident,
 Or Jove for's power to thunder. His heart's his mouth.
 What his breast forges, that his tongue must vent;
 And, being angry, does forget that ever
 He heard the name of death (3. 1. 255-259).

However, in Brecht, this rigidity is perverse. "His switch from being the most Roman of the Romans to becoming their deadliest enemy is due precisely to the fact that he stays the same."⁵⁹ Consequently,

⁵⁹Brecht, "Study of the first scene of Shakespeare's Coriolanus," in "Brecht's Notes," p. 378.

Brecht's Coriolanus presents the synthesis of the opposites. Ironically, it is the hero's very inflexibility that effects the synthesis of the ultimate Roman and the basest traitor.

In Brecht, even Coriolanus' characterization as the noblest Roman is not really "engaging." His inflexibility amid the constant change casts him as the "humorous" comic antagonist in a society that is not really negative. The audience cannot share his pessimism at the loss of his ideal in the face of reality because the ideals are life negating while the society celebrates change, flux, and humanity. Although Brecht's Coriolanus seems to possess the same ideals as Shakespeare's the differing comic contexts results in a different assessment of these ideals by Brecht's audience. Brecht's hero's optimism while willing an ideal is undercut by the inaccuracy of his vision. Although a hero's distorted world image can result in audience emotional involvement, as it does so often in Osborne's plays, Brecht constantly focuses upon the heroism and not the heroics. Because Jimmy Porter and Martin Luther combat vapid societies their willed elevation infuses the societies with energy. The energy itself is admirable. But, Coriolanus' energy and elevated vitality only immerses him in the comic community. As the vitality metamorphoses into a "humor" he descends considerably below the energy and will of the citizens. Coriolanus' ideals are really only idealistic in his value system. Therefore, as his heroism becomes mere heroics he focuses more upon the physical appearance of his self-image than the essence or spirit.

Brecht's hero remains adamant in his specious transcendence. As the

citizens grow in their awareness Coriolanus maintains his image of them and his transcendence above them. His image of the citizens is naturalistic--they are too much like animals. He fails to comprehend their real hunger is causing their disunity and unreasonableness in the initial scene.

You cur
That like nor peace nor war. War frightens you
Peace makes you insolent. Anyone who trusts you
Finds hares when he wants lions, geese when he looks
For foxes. . . . You curse the senate who with the help of the gods
Maintain some little order. If they didn't
You'd feed upon each other.

Waste grain on them! . . . they'd get their answer
From my sword.

Hang 'em! Damnation!
They shouted they were hungry, bellowed slogans
That hunger breaks stone walls, that dogs must eat
That bread is made for mouths, that the gods don't send
Fruit for the rich alone. And much such nonsense (p. 64).

Thus, Coriolanus forgets the people when war is announced--because they are not really human to him. The fight itself is his prime consideration; however, he hopes to attract the citizens to war by luring them like rats to the grain of the Volscians: "take these rats with you/To gnaw their garners" (p. 67). However, Brecht's focus on Brutus' admonition to the citizens to go to war because of Rome and to forget the struggle for grain negates Coriolanus' evaluation of the citizens. Even when he terms the soldiers the "shame of Rome!" in battle, Brecht's soldiers are pardoned because in war Coriolanus is foolhardy (p. 71).

As Brecht presents Coriolanus' desire for transcendence--so that he even withdraws from the approbation of all men--after the battles, his image remains inflexible. His fear about the dangers of the new

democracy and the increasing power of the tribunes is unfounded; unlike Shakespeare's tribunes who would seek power as a Hydra (3. 1. 91-104) Brecht's tribunes are not power-hungry--just hungry. After the battle the Romans are reasonable in their requests of Coriolanus--not self-seeking rabble who want free grain. As Coriolanus is "asking" for votes, he breaks into song (one of the most obvious alienation devices in the play). He presents this "entertainment" to embarrass the crowd, but as he sings he actually diminishes himself. The contents of the song call attention to his valor and his wounds:

Here stands C. Marcius Coriolan
Trying to please the common man
He's selling the Roman eagle here
.
Gentlemen, my wounds. These. And
these.
Look closely. Touch them if you please.
I'll serve you for a penny; I'll
dance. . . .
For your votes
I've got two dozen scars. I've fought
In eighteen battles (p. 98).

Shakespeare's Coriolanus never shows any pride in his wounds or boasting in the market place. Brecht's Coriolanus is "pure" in his pride--he is the eagle, with no alliance to country, family, or citizens. In Brecht, Coriolanus is a traitor because he is a false evaluator of the society's motives who would not give the people their due--grain and respect.

In his leave-taking of his friends, wife, and family Coriolanus maintains an image of singularity and self-sufficiency. When he goes to Aufidius he seeks through "sheer hatred, lust to be avenged on all/ That rabble" (p. 123). His image of the society has not changed al-

though Brecht has presented the society's maturing. Coriolanus' rigidity which might have made him "outsize"⁶⁰ and noble in the earlier scenes now seems foolish blindness to the real world--a world which has recognized that he is not indispensable. To emphasize the essential foolishness of Coriolanus' stance against the Romans Brecht almost completely rewrites the scene between Coriolanus and his family that leads to his reversal.

In Shakespeare, Coriolanus is persuaded by the mother's speech that emphasizes the clithonic gods of the hearth over the personal image that prevents Coriolanus from being a traitor to himself. (His image demands manhood through military action and candor; all else is treachery).

O mother, mother!
 What have you done? Behold, the heavens do ope,
 The gods look down, and this unnatural scene
 They laugh at. O my mother, mother! O!
 You have won a happy victory to Rome;
 But for your son--believe it, O believe it!--
 Most dangerously you have with him prevailed,
 If not most mortal to him (5. 3. 182-189).

As he accepts her appeal, he is aware that he will be sacrificed; so he attempts to retain his honor by making peace with Rome--but peace with honor for all. He returns to Aufidius with the spoils (gained by war up to the gates of Rome) and the treaty with Rome and is labelled "traitor". He retains his transcendent honorable image by emphasizing his control of the situation; only his own power has made it possible for Aufidius to kill him: "O that I had him, with six Aufidiuses, or more, his tribe,/To use my lawful sword" (5. 6. 127-130)! In Shakespeare, Coriolanus' final action is no simple foolish pride in the face

⁶⁰"R", "Study of the first scene of Shakespeare's Coriolanus," in "Brecht's Notes," p. 382.

of reality; his nobility at the end is part of the play's reversal--in this sense, he is indeed indispensable.

Brecht's parallel scene eliminates all possible grounds of appeals by Volumnia except the purely materialistic ones and the one that is solely related to Coriolanus' blind pride: the army of the "rabble," the precarious position of the nobility, and the demise of his public image. There is little mention of the spirit or any higher reasons for changing his mind. Even his mother characterizes his obstinance as "childish"--not a matter of honor.

Enough of
Your childish sentiment. I've something else
To say. The Rome you will be marching on
Is very different from the Rome you left.
You are no longer indispensable
Merely a deadly threat to all. . . . If you see smoke
It will be rising from the smithies forging
Weapons to fight you who, to subject your
Own people, have submitted to your enemy.
And we, the proud nobility of Rome
Must owe the rabble our salvation from the
Volscians, or owe the Volscians our
Salvation from the rabble (p. 142).

When Coriolanus replies "O mother, mother! What have you done?" the audience response is most likely to laugh when he cries. His statement seems to be just another rationalization of his real guilt. When he returns from the gates of Rome there is no mention of the peace with honor--only the spoils. To the end Brecht's Coriolanus seeks merely to retain his war-like image: the "eagle in a dovecote" (p. 145). His re-capitulation is effected, in contradiction to Shakespeare, by "All the swords/In Italy, and her confederate arms" (5. 3. 207-208). With the shifted focus to the plebs' maturity, Brecht's Coriolanus seems almost comic in his unincremental repetition of his assertions. But he also

seems tragic just in the heightened manner that he affirms his transcendent image.

Osborne's presentation of the society is analagous to Shakespeare's. There is even in his portrayal the same Tudor implication that democracy will not function in the society because of its tremendous chaotic turmoil and the self-seeking of all men. Osborne presents the citizens as gullible, emotional, and irrational in the initial scene; but he does not absolve them since hunger is not the immediate issue that it is in Brecht. The society is so easily lead that its discussions and placards belie an essential emptiness. Osborne terms them a "mob" instead of a society: "a cross-section MOB of STUDENTS, FIXERS, PUSHERS, POLICEMEN, UNIDENTIFIABLE PUBLIC, obvious TRADE UNIONISTS, JOURNALISTS and the odd NEWS CAMERA TEAM, SOUND-MEN, etc., . . . banners of the nineteenth-century sort, banners of the modern kind-- 'CAIUS MARCIUS: GO FUCK YOURSELF'; 'WE WANT A LAY NOT DELAY'; 'ONE QUARTER OWNS THREE-QUARTERS'; 'NO MORE TRIX JUST A FIX' ; . . (p. 13). But the common man is not the problem in Rome. Osborne's picture of the individual citizen--when not under the influence of the tribunes--is of an essentially reasoning and good man. However, as part of a mob, the individual human is lost. The main organizers of the mob in A Place Calling Itself Rome are the tribunes, Sicinius (a black woman) and Brutus. They are portrayed as so self-serving that they manufacture much of the trouble in the play between Coriolanus and the plebs. Their duplicity and malice cannot be expiated; the instruments of "peace" are the real instruments of the failure of the revolution. The citizens pass from the control of the patrician senators to the plebe-

ian tribunes. When Coriolanus is banished, the society remains the same--although the Brechtian historical frame simultaneously presents the collapse of that revolution and society as well as auguring that of contemporary England.

Coriolanus' role in Osborne's Rome-England differs from both Shakespeare's and Brecht's portrayal. In A Place Calling Itself Rome Coriolanus seeks elevation in the society but is controlled by the guile of the tribunes. He is really banished by them--not the citizens. He also wills an image of transcendence that is impossible in that society for any human being. The discrepancy between his conscious and unconscious images is shown in the first two scenes: the twilight dream reality and the garrish willed appearance. This device of the dream to suggest the non-transcendent reality of the hero is a staple in many Osborne plays--most notably, Inadmissible Evidence. Coriolanus' dream suggests several areas of non-transcendent reality: immersion in a crowd vs. individual identity; intellectual impotence with real decisions impossible only "forced ones" vs. intellectual control; inability to write or speak vs. real, lucid communication; arrant body concentration and sex "flickers" with "no flame" vs. potency and control; tears "far too close, close too hard" vs. emotional stability; absurdities "lying aware" vs. awareness and action; "just spectacle" vs. action; physical squalor vs. cleanliness (p. 12). Coriolanus' ideal self-image is of willed control over the society, the body, the mind, the word. Yet, Osborne's image of man in the society is just the opposite; this lack of control is most exemplified in Rome by the lack of real communication. "Words is that they, that is, people, expect

them to mean either what they say, don't say, or may say . . . (p. 13)."

Osborne himself believes that words are extremely important.

"They may be dispensed with, but it seems to me that they're the last link with God. When millions of people seem unable to communicate with one another, it's vitally important that words are made to work. It may be very old-fashioned, but they're the only things we have left."⁶¹

Coriolanus wills his self-control and the real communication of his vision of the society to the citizens, but he is ineffectual in both goals. He can neither transcend ordinary human limitations nor his historical image.

Coriolanus is Osborne's most accurate evaluator of his society. Unlike many of the other Osborne heroes, the state of flux and chaos of the society needs no exaggeration for Coriolanus to transcend the common man (who loses his identity in the mob). His transcendence is so real that he will always be the malcontent through his awareness of the situation. In this aspect Osborne adopts Shakespeare's characterization. However, Osborne's Coriolanus cannot attain his image of manhood where the word reflects the heart and mind as Shakespeare's and even Brecht's Coriolanus can. Coriolanus' recognition of his inability to transcend masks him; a willed appearance hides the untranscendent reality. His concept of "control" would demand this.

In his first public presentation Coriolanus' characterization is not unjust or irrational. With no pressing societal problem--like hunger--Coriolanus' portrayal of the crowd in terms of the fearful elements of his dream does not seem as cruel as in Brecht or Shakespeare.

⁶¹"Osborne and Tynan on Life," p. 5.

Peace and war both intimidate you. You've no pride or fear either. . . . You're capable of anything. Every minute some so-called mind changes itself. You cavil, haggle, you're wise after every event's been routed by the simplest of intuition (pp. 19-20).

He follows the indictment with his own appraisal of Rome's needs--focusing upon his willed transcendent qualities: "in a free and civilized Rome, this is all achieved not by compulsion of authority but by the intelligence of individual men" (pp. 20-1). He admires the whole identity, not the "shreds of personality." But ironically Osborne presents Coriolanus himself becoming a shred of personality. In Scene 2 he is only a deputy to Cominius but is promised that his "recognition will come" (p. 22). Yet, that recognition will be only in terms of his cold pride and valor--not his awareness and insight into the political situation. Osborne presents part of the genesis of the historical image in the discussion of the self-serving tribunes after Coriolanus exits to prepare for war. As they decry his coldness, arrogance and "obviousness," the audience synthesizes their evaluation with the crowd's conduct and Coriolanus' speech and recognizes the sophistry of their statement.

In war, Coriolanus praises his troops until they are beaten back, then he lambastes them using obscenities and losing control. His words do not affect the soldiers, who even justify their cowardliness by "twisting" his words. In a second attack maneuver, Coriolanus controls his temper and receives a response. However, his tirade is more "honest" than his controlled cliches. The dialectic is presented: he is in control and communicates with empty words; he is spontaneous and misunderstood with a real message. After Coriolanus is wounded he ex-

presses his concern about the distortion of his image: "Wait for the reports, the courts, the writers after the events; the ones who'll call us bloody and never mind your wounds or skill or patience" (p. 32).

The war experience is an exercise in control for Coriolanus. When he returns to his wife he recognizes the substance beyond the regulations --he gives vent to his untranscendent emotions: "I've seen and done bad things." He immediately regains control and begs her forgiveness for the "slip" (p. 38).

When Coriolanus expresses disdain at appearing before the people, his reason is not disdain for the approbation of the mob; he abhors the use of the "everyday coinage" or phrases that will "make them feel the illusion of power, or the ritual bestowings of it" (p. 42). The tribunes decide to create an opposite image of his concern for the people. They convince the crowd of Coriolanus' hatred of them: "Didn't you see one outstretched palm and the other raising up his finger at you?" (p. 47). The tribunes persuade through trickery and cliché misrepresentation of Coriolanus' motives as well as the mob's personal esteem-- "You are conned and conned easily . . ." (p. 47). The ease of their sophist persuasion is contrasted to Coriolanus' reasoned, controlled words (until the tribunes appear) that are misunderstood. He is not accepted by the crowd until he begins to lose control: "Anything can be allowed to happen or rise up if it's only in the name of common tradition. Rather than that, they can stuff their boots up to their elbow and let 'em stay there" (p. 45). The control that Coriolanus admires cannot effect the social change that he deems necessary. But, the emotional language that is little more than a tantrum is so effusive that

it is meaningless but ironically successful. The mob's emotional approval is easily transformed into derision by the tribunes. Nevertheless, the emotional language is more honest; Coriolanus becomes a traitor ("your mouth is your undoing"[p. 51]) as he becomes a real communicator of the society's ills: "let's get to your policies; the ones without purpose--except to indulge the worst of you and pacify the rest" (p. 51). His final speech before his exile presents his impasse with the society--the emphasis is upon their essentially vacuous uncommunicating "communication."

Stay here in your slum. And strike. Communicate. Get shakes with rumours; fads; modishness; greed; fashion; your clannishness; your lives in depth. . . . I have seen the future . . . here . . . and it doesn't work! I turn my back. There is a world elsewhere (pp. 57-8).

The irreconcilable difference between Osborne's Coriolanus and the society is not his military pride against the plebs' cowardice--as is the conflict in Brecht's Coriolanus. In A Place Calling Itself Rome, Coriolanus is the oracle that will not be heard by the people--because both are being controlled by the tribunes. Even in his transcendence, Coriolanus is immersed in the society or the mob. As he communicates emotionally he loses himself (or his self-image) and exhibits the same characteristics that he sees in the mob.

The more emotional he becomes the more his historical image becomes real. At his final speech he refers to the Romans as animals-- "You common cry of curs" (p. 57) and sings a song (reminiscent of Brecht) that is "a parody of 'the Red Flag'":

'The Working Class
Can Kiss My Arse
And keep their Red

Rag flying high' (p. 58).

The Coriolanus who is so troubled by the conditions of the Roman society and the rampant hypocrisy of the tribunes embraces the image that the tribunes have given him--to achieve some elevation in society.

Even though the historical image is one of snobbish elevation, Coriolanus' self-image is that of a failure. When he comes to Aufidius he is "dressed like a working man" (p. 62); he does not term his treachery as honorable--it is "for miserable spite." He recognizes his failure to transcend, but cannot accept it. His misery is so great that his concession to his mother is an attempt to recover his former self: "you don't know what you've done to him. But perhaps you do, and you were right to have done it" (p. 74). He "patches up the peace" with "all kinds of concessions" in a document of "peace with honour" (p. 76). Since Osborne has stressed true communication as part of Coriolanus' transcendence, he omits any mention of spoils and merely presents Coriolanus' achievement of a personal elevation synthesized with his historical image of military pride. Coriolanus remains the traitor to the Romans but is also able to achieve his controlled self-image, implied by his criticism of Aufidius:

You have wit, genius, eloquence, imagination, affection: but you have no understanding and consequently no standard of thought or action. . . . You hate any law that imposes on your understanding or any kind of restraint at all. . . . If your blood's not heated by passion, then it turns to poison (pp. 76-7).

This final speech is reasoned and restrained but ineffectual; Coriolanus does die. Yet his action is similar to Redl's in A Patriot for Me. Both men cannot totally achieve transcendence without their reputation in the society; both accept the impossibility of their real

elevation as they embrace a historical or public image that is not completely accurate; both synthesize the public and private images in a final act that mirrors their concept of transcendence. Both men are ultimately immersed in the turmoil and chaos that they detest--since no human being can escape it.

Osborne's adaptation of Brecht's stage devices essentially should elicit emotional response and intellectual awareness. This technique is constant throughout his Brecht experience. Nevertheless, there is a discernable growth in Osborne's heroes. Archie Rice, Paul Slickey, and even Luther seek transcendence through heightened vitality contrary to the "norms" of the society. Their societies are composed of people who are mediocre but basically harmless--who are settling into the comic rhythm of survival. Alfred Redl and Coriolanus are immersed in societies that are not only tumultuous and valueless but treacherous and sinister. Consequently, both men's transcendent ideal is not heightened vitality but control, restraint, and intelligence. Their ideal is juxtaposed to the societies' reality. When Redl and Coriolanus indulge in emotional outbursts or the "flaming" monologues of the earlier heroes they are aware of their immersion in the chaos--not their elevation above it. The development of Osborne's heroes reflects his assessment of the English society's degeneration. His presentation of the heroes in the frame of historical vs. private image suggests his sense of the evitability of the situation and its critical emptiness. Even though the societies can produce men with at least the aspirations to transcend, it must be remembered that Redl and Coriolanus can not exist in the society and maintain any vestige of elevation. Only George

Dillon and the rest could at least retain the public image of malcontents.

Redl and Coriolanus are not tragic in their deaths. Their final suicides arise out of a comic acceptance of their public image bestowed by the chaotic society. Their irreconcilable stance toward the comic world is demonstrated by the ritualistic manner of the suicides. The deaths reflect their image of transcendent man at the same moment that they affirm the societies they detest. In these later plays, the individual cannot exist in the society, even unhappily, and attain any elevation. Nevertheless, their acceptance of death is essentially the same decision that all Osborne heroes make--Jimmy with Allison, Archie with Phoebe in jail or in Canada, Luther with his nun.

CHAPTER V

CONFRONTATIONS IN THE WORLDS OF FANTASY --

PLAYS FOR ENGLAND

Osborne's Plays for England,¹ produced one year after Luther in 1962, were critical failures. The first play, The Blood of the Bambergers, is often labelled the "'feeblest' play in the Osborne cannon."² The second play fares slightly better with the public because of its subject matter; Under Plain Cover is "a sado-masochistic menage" complete in one act with an incestuous relationship.³ The plays are not Osborne at his best. One of the problems is simply that Osborne needs more time to develop his characteristic comic dialectic than either the two-act "fairy story," The Blood of the Bambergers, or the one-act play provides. The comic dialectic is not absent from either play; it is just presented and not developed. Consequently, the Osborne hero in both plays, and his comic contests, fade into the backgrounds of the plays while the societal problems dominate. Once the society comes in to critical focus the "angry young man" epithet cannot be far behind.

¹ John Osborne, Plays for England: The Blood of the Bambergers and Under Plain Cover in Plays for England, I. The Blood of the Bambergers, II. Under Plain Cover and The World of Paul Slickey, Evergreen Black Cat Edition (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1962). Subsequent references will be in the text.

² Carter, John Osborne, p. 120.

³ Tynan, Tynan Right and Left, p. 109.

The societal problems in The Blood of the Bambergs revolve around the concept of "royalty religion".⁴ In the plot of the play a royal wedding between Princess Melanie and Prince Wilhelm is jeopardized by Wilhelm's death. The ministers, fearing the collapse of the government, persuade an Australian photographer who has a remarkable resemblance to Wilhelm (the photographer is the king's illegitimate son) to take his place. He agrees and the wedding takes place on schedule. This basic situation was quite topical in 1962 because of the wedding of Princess Margaret and Anthony Armstrong-Jones. During the course of the play Osborne focuses less on this situation than the reaction of the world to the "god-like" royalty (p. 64). A religion of this sort is quite formalized. Censure of the rituals connected with the religion is presented through press interviews in the manner of a revue-sketch with interviews by the media with various representatives of the society.

This technique was quite popular in the 1960's in England. The year before Plays for England a successful revue, Beyond the Fringe,⁵ began a long run. Again we see the popular nature of Osborne's theatrical techniques. In the interviews the satire is double-edged: cutting both interviewer and interviewee. The parody of the press emphasizes the essential inane language and the paradoxical nature of their comments as they make so much ado about nothing. Osborne attempts to imi-

⁴Ferrar, John Osborne, p. 29.

⁵John Russell Taylor, "Revue," The Penguin Dictionary of the Theatre (Baltimore: Penguin Books Inc., 1970), pp. 234-5.

tate the voice of various media people known, at least by type. His Mr. Wimple is recognized by the critics as the late Richard Dimbleby.⁶ Mr. Wimple's "well-groomed humility" (p. 7), in the cathedral, is juxtaposed to the identical manner during the secular interviews about the reaction to the wedding. The setting of the opening and closing scenes in the cathedral emphasize the concept that the real religion in England is royalty. The press coverage at the end includes Wimple and five journalists from different types of papers in England: "a weary, solemn newspaper. . . . a retarded glossy. . . . a right, rasping popular daily. . . . a mass woman's weekly. . . . a large American News Agency" (p. 59). Osborne imitates each paper's characteristic style in a tour-de-force presentation of their wedding coverage. The satiric targets in the interviews include the welfare system, the politicians, the working man (Mr. Lemon), and the common man's reaction to the glamour of it all. The critics find the satire both too exaggerated, hackneyed, and somewhat disconnected from the royalty plot. This is probably why the play resembles the revue-sketch since the interviews and the media coverage of the wedding seem to open and close the play but not pierce the middle. George E. Wellworth's assessment is severe but not singular: "a witless farago of disorganized scenes, none of them germane to anything in real life."⁷

⁶Hayman, John Osborne, p. 5.

⁷"John Osborne: 'Angry Young Man' (1964)?," John Osborne. Look Back in Anger. A Casebook, ed. by John Russell Taylor (Nashville: Aurora Publishers Incorporated, 1970), p. 12.

The royalty plot forming the middle of the play contains two murders. One victim is a journalist posing as a footman who discovers Wilhelm's death and the substitution of Mr. Russell. He is killed by Colonel Taft, the Prime Minister. The second victim is just "a loyal subject" (p. 52) who leads such a little and unimportant life that she hides under the dirty clothes in the palace laundry chute for two days and nights just to meet Prince Wilhelm. When she does, or thinks she does, she is so overcome with passion--even though she has three children and a husband--that she kills herself exclaiming "It was worth it" (p. 51). The satire here is obvious in both cases. One criticism lambastes the real criminality of the ministers who plan on issuing a statement that the woman killed both herself and the footman. The other action criticizes the press' coverage of royalty to the little people "who watch, and worship" and lead their "little unimportant lives" in their "little place", with their "little dignity" (p. 51). These two events do not blend in with the tenor set by the revue-sketch interviews.

Finally, the critics descry Osborne's presentation of the royalty. The Princess imitated the Queen's voice as she bewailed the unbelievable boredom of the royal life.

My whole weary system is spinning around forever like a royal satellite in a space of infinite and enduring boredom. Oh, my God, I am so bored! . . . I am so bored, do you hear me, my people? . . . I am bored with you, my people, my loyal subjects, I am so bored that even this cheap little Australian looks like relieving it for a few brief moments, now and then, in the rest of my lifetime (p. 58).

The critical view is that the presentation of royalty is a little too

sympathetic for the satire.⁸ However, this point is not entirely valid. The sympathy the audience feels is part of the satire of royalty religion since religion implies an elevated object of worship, and sympathy negates this type of elevation. Also, Melanie's iciness is juxtaposed to the common woman who commits the passionate suicide. Osborne's audience's antipathy for the ludicrous conduct of the woman would elicit a more sympathetic response for the "distant" Princess. They feel for both extremes while realizing that they are both products of the same societal values.

It must be admitted that much of the critical evaluations are valid. It seems that Osborne wanted to write a play in the same mode as a popular form which was not a play. The difficulty involved seems obvious. The sketch is not a play, nor can several sketches become a play because of the organic nature of the drama and the complete, "self-sufficient" nature of the sketch. However, Osborne does seem to be aware of this difficulty as he tries to combine the sketch interview material with the royalty plot. Perhaps this fusion was doomed to failure from the start--again because the sketch exists as a vignette complete with frame and without causal relationships to other vignettes or actions. Yet, Osborne's royalty plot does not focus as much on the royal substitute Alan Russell. Although he is the forgotten man in the criticism of the play, he is the Osborne hero without the obvious trappings of language or rebellion. (His closest brother is Bill Maitland of Inadmissible Evidence in Osborne's next play.) Even in this flawed

⁸ Carter, John Osborne, p. 119.

play Osborne is consistent in his presentation of the comic dialectic that all his heroes experience. The people in the pictures of the society presented in the revue-sketch interviews are Alan Russell's enemies.

There is a discernible pattern in the type of protest the Osborne hero consciously adapts to achieve transcendence. The more fragmented and malevolent the society, the more the hero's stance derives its values from the past. The constancy of ideals counters the tumult of the society. In this vein there are Osborne's later heroes, Coriolanus and Alfred Redl, as well as Jimmy Porter (whose vision of the society is invalid). The more unified and essentially empty and lumpen the society, the more the hero's stance derives its values from ways to beat the system. Archie Rice, Luther, George Dillon and Jimmy Porter (in his naturalistic world view) all adopt elevated postures that exalt the spirit and the lack of fixed standards or "norms" of behavior. Alan Russell is part of the latter group. The English society in The Blood of the Bambergs is not only empty but ritualistic. It is so imbued in the worship of royalty that Russell is elevated by his wily manipulation of the society's inflexibility. He is the trickster who is part of almost every Fairy Story (the subtitle of the play). At first glance the story seems unreal--what appears to be fantasy is actually reality. But the essence of the fairy story is present in Osborne's characterization of Alan Russell--the manipulation, the foresight, and the metamorphosis.⁹

⁹William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard, "Fairy Tale," A Handbook to Literature, revised and enlarged by C. Hugh Holman (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1960), pp. 197-8.

From the beginning of the play Russell is contrasted to the other members of the society: he looks "bored and exhausted" (p. 7) during the interviews and is discovered by the ministers asleep and drunk. Because he is Australian he is estranged from the frenzy accompanying the royal wedding in England. He believes he will be able to change into Prince Wilhelm and still retain his identity. He agrees to the deception only because of the material benefit. Like Bill Maitland in the later play, Russell is an opportunist in the society. He has success but no real talent. He chiefly seeks his own enjoyment and is little interested in duty. However, he comes to recognize that he is really not free (the minister stops any thought of departure with a gun) and that with Wilhelm's riches he also inherits problems.

Although Alan believes he is in control of the situation he recognizes that he is not as hard-boiled and cynical as he believes. His ordinary human limitations fail the trickster. At the height of his belief in his transcendent control of the situation, the woman who finally commits suicide enters. Russell is in control until he recognizes the "raw desire" in her "contorted" face. He cannot manipulate her enough to accept the "ugly challenge" (p. 49) that she presents. With her suicide Russell recognizes the ugliness of the game he's been playing. He also realizes that he cannot be the trickster: "She asked too much, too much from life and too much from me, in particular" (p. 52). His posed reaction to the woman is parallel to the minister's reaction to the deaths of the footman and Wilhelm. The vital trickster seems as cold as the royalty.

The usual Osborne comic impasse is seen in Russell's meeting with

Melanie. Part of his initial direct characterization has been his vital sexuality. He was thereby differentiated from both Wilhelm who seemed to be suicidal in his pursuit of a faster speed in a faster car, and Heinrich, the younger brother, who is "as queer as a cucumber" and "as bent as a bloody boomerang" (p. 24). When Russell meets Melanie he continues his stance of the sensual trickster. But as the meeting ends he has synthesized the sexuality to the royalty religion: "being so close to you, I suddenly understand the meaning of royalty. I feel the long, thrusting, sexual stimulus of the crown" (p. 57). As the scene ends Russell accepts Melanie's frigidity. As he kisses her, she breaks away exclaiming that she "can't bear to be touched" (p. 58)! Russell simply replies that he will see her in church thereby combining the attitude of the devil-may-care trickster with the man totally immersed in the society. This comic immersion is underscored by his real royal blood. Instead of being inartistic, as Carter suggests, the fact that Alan Russell is so "perfectly presentable"¹⁰ as royalty (although he is an imposter) is an essential image of the comic dialectic.

Obviously, Alan Russell's characterization is meant to be an important part of the play. However, Russell is not presented with the same care that Osborne uses to expose the ironies of the society. Especially noticeable is Russell's lack of the Osborne staple--the diatribe. Besides setting the tone of defiance in other plays, the language of the diatribe presents character traits and self-images. Alan's language is weak in The Blood of the Bambergs since it is jux-

¹⁰Ibid.

taped to the satiric style of the revue-interviews. Consequently, the Osborne hero minus both language and focus is divested of his heroic status.

Under Plain Cover is a one-act play about a young couple, brother and sister, who seem average but who are actually engaged in several sexual fantasies. The incestuous couple is discovered by the press and broken up. The girl marries an average young man. However, two years later she returns to her brother to presumably resume their life-style. They are together seven years later. The usual critical evaluation of the play stresses the sexually abnormal relationship, the press' role in the society, and the disunity of the two parts.

To some critics Osborne is indicting the press for its impersonal manufacture of news. Ferrar terms the indictment a "flailing castigation of the 'murderous' disengagement of Fleet Street" ¹¹ However, perhaps John Russell Taylor's criticism is more apt: the reporter Stanley seems to be the "ghost of Paul Slickey"--a "snooping, cynical reporter." ¹² The focus in the play is more on the reporter than the effects of the report. It is obvious that the press' influence on Jenny and Tim's relationship is not permanent. However, the effect upon Stanley, the representative of the press, is; the final stage direction indicates that Stanley "collapses, drunk and miserable. Dead possibly" when the reunited couple refuses to heed his admonition that

¹¹Ferrar, John Osborne, p. 30.

¹²"John Osborne," John Osborne. Look Back in Anger. A Casebook, ed. by John Russell Taylor (Nashville: Aurora Publishers Incorporated, 1970), p. 95.

"You can't escape the world. Even if you want to, it won't let you" (p. 114). This final act is a result of Stanley's concept of himself as the singular upholder of morals in the society. He is the true man and others are merely animals.

What sickened me was the way everyone behaved. As if it were a cattle auction. I tell you, I could have cheerfully seized hold of him and broken his neck. Cringing, pleading, whining. It was disgusting (p. 105).

He smashes the "dream world" (p. 104) of the couple but refuses to pay the postman for his story because he doesn't "believe in all this trading in human beings" (p. 106). He introduces Jenny to a respectable young man with "both feet on the ground" and "nothing wrong or perverted" (p. 108). The boy is so respectable that Stanley is not sure that he and Jenny really knew each other long enough before marriage. Stanley's morality is compromised by the circus presentation of Jenny's wedding where the wedding reception is "quickly improvised" (p. 109). He had promised a dignified wedding. When he comes to the couple's house nine years later he seeks admission into their isolated dream world because "Life hasn't been too good to me either" (p. 113). However, he is not admitted since he seeks entry in the guise of the world, the press.

In Stanley's plight we can recognize the barest, almost shadowy emergence of the Osborne hero's comic transcendence thwarted by the world. There is also the general progression of the Osborne hero in a fragmentated, tumultuous society: elevation through morality or past idealism, recognition of membership in the community of "animals" ("you only try to be moral when you're drunk" [p. 110]), acceptance of

the perversion without rejection of his transcendence, and death (possibly). However, the play certainly does not focus upon Stanley as much as the young couple. But again it is important to acknowledge Osborne's use of the comic dialectic, even in its most shadowy form, in every play he writes.

The sexual fantasies presented in Tim and Jenny's private life revolve around masquerades. They receive the costumes "under plain cover" in the mail. As doctor and nurse, English upper-crust employer and maid, they act out what the critics term "anal-sadistic" relationships.¹³ Several critics view the presentation of this subject as Osborne on the soapbox either condoning the necessity for diversions in the modern suburban marriage, or upholding the rights of the sexual deviate.¹⁴ In the fantasy world of Tim and Jenny there is also a long discourse on a heretofore unspeakable stage subject--knickers. This leads into a witty discussion of writers of the avant-garde.

Knickers, the eponymous hero of the trilogy. Hey, what about the critics? . . . Well, you know. This week, we have been to see knickers. . . . It seems to me that these knickers are speaking out of a private, obsessional world--full of meaning for them. . . . What do they really offer to put up as an alternative? . . . I suppose what they were aiming at was pure lingerie. . . . Exactly, and then, of course, there's the obvious influence of Genet. . . . these knickers may seem to work, but what is the manufacturer's attitude to them? . . . It means you enjoyed yourself at the time, but now you're ashamed to admit it (p. 100)!

Because of this discussion the play is considered to be influenced by

¹³Tynan, Tynan Right and Left, p. 109.

¹⁴See Wellworth in Look Back in Anger. A Casebook, p. 127; Carter in John Osborne, p. 122; Tynan in Tynan Right and Left, p. 109, Trussler in John Osborne, p. 20.

Genet or as one critic says: Under Plain Cover is "a provincial English casserole of Genet."¹⁵

It is true that Genet was an important commodity in England at the time of the play. The Balcony was produced in London in 1957.¹⁶ The Balcony and Under Plain Cover are ostensibly similar. Both plays present characters who "satisfy their fetishes"¹⁷ by playing roles familiar to the society. Osborne's play presents the same concept of sex as "a matter of domination and submission" as Genet's play.¹⁸ The English play affirms Genet's concept of the need for fantasy in a regimented society. Through their fantasies Tim and Jenny achieve love and life. But, they recognize the ritual, non-real nature of their fantasies. The ritual fixes their lives as the ritual of royalty religion affords the English society some certainty. Stanley's moral posturing is also a masquerade that attempts to control the lurching flexibility. However, because his fantasy is interior he cannot isolate himself from the society and keep the illusion intact. When he discovers the illusory nature of his elevated image he cannot divest himself of the masquerade as easily as Tim and Jenny. Therefore, the two fragments of the play highlight the essential differences between the two types of il-

¹⁵ Frederick Lunley, New Trends in 20th Century Drama. A Survey Since Ibsen and Shaw (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 229.

¹⁶ John Russell Taylor, "Genet, Jean," in The Penguin Dictionary of the Theatre (Baltimore: Penguin Books Inc., 1970), p. 113.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 112.

¹⁸ Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, p. 185.

lusion. There is no subject change or "padding" of the play;¹⁹ the parts are related.

In fairness to the critics the play is flawed. The general tenor may suggest Genet, but the technique does not. The one-act length is simply too short to develop the suggested ideas. One is left not with a theatrical image of man's need of fantasy but with the Osborne verbal virtuosity which is most easily connected to the epithet "angry."

¹⁹This is the viewpoint of most of the play's critics including Trussler, Carter, Hayman, Ferrar.

CHAPTER VI

DREAM-REALITY AND THE PERSONAL CONTEST--

INADMISSIBLE EVIDENCE

The society in Inadmissible Evidence (1965)¹ does not move to the cacophonous comic rhythm of A Patriot for Me or A Place Calling Itself Rome; this society is simply as vapid as George Dillon's and Jimmy Porter's. Life is orderly, materialistic, mechanical and full of essentially sensible and mediocre people. The hero of this play must seek elevation in some conduct that disturbs the comic rhythm. However, Bill Maitland, a lawyer, is not in a profession that suggests the avant-garde life; he is neither sweet-stall operator nor artist nor bawdy music-hall entertainer. Although J. R. Brown states that Inadmissible Evidence moves in a direct successive line from Look Back in Anger, and The Entertainer,² it actually does not. The hero is not cut from the same cloth. He seems closer to those bastions of past societies--Alfred Redl and Coriolanus. Yet, Bill Maitland's society is not as discordant as those of the heroes of the later plays. He cannot retreat to a control and reticence to elevate himself--he would only mirror the mediocre comic community. Inadmissible Evidence is a transi-

¹John Osborne, Inadmissible Evidence (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1965). Subsequent references to this play will be from this edition and will be given in the text.

²John Russell Brown, Theatre Language: A Study of Arden, Osborne, Pinter and Wesker (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, Inc., 1972, p. 153.

tion point in Osborne's canon--the society man is presented in the valueless English society. Therefore, there is no ostensive comic contest in the play since Osborne's malcontent now seems successfully content. The dialectic between the hero's elevated self-image and his non-transcendent personal reality is the only comic contest in the play.

The dramatic form Osborne uses in this play is essentially devoid of the extrinsic images of society that Brecht's epic theatre and naturalism present. Because the inner conflict is focal, Osborne's dramatic form concentrates on the interior with a synthesis of dream-reality and reality-dream. As in the similar use of naturalism in Look Back in Anger Osborne gives only a brief objective delineation of the world that Maitland moves in; he is only objectively seen in his claustrophobic office. But even in this office scene Osborne blends reality and dream. This economic unification of theme to form is perhaps the chief reason why Inadmissible Evidence is often considered Osborne's best play--the height of his artistic maturity.³

Inadmissible Evidence begins with a dream sequence which blends into a realistic presentation of a lawyer's office routine which blends into another dream sequence. The setting remains constant throughout to suggest that the real conflict of Bill Maitland is within. Unlike

³This critical evaluation was stated in several sources; for example: Ferrar in John Osborne, p. 33; John Russell Taylor in "Inadmissible Evidence," in Look Back in Anger. A Casebook, p. 96 (he terms the evaluation a "critical commonplace"); and Arthur Nicholas Athanason in his unpublished doctoral dissertation "John Osborne: From Apprenticeship to Artistic Maturity" (The Pennsylvania State University, 1972) --Inadmissible Evidence is the last play considered since Athanason believes it is the height of Osborne's artistic maturity.

an Archie Rice or even a Luther, Bill Maitland's conscious elevation and comic immersion are not effected by his surroundings. He is already comic in his membership in the privileged middle-class of the English society. This membership includes law practice, suburban home, cultured wife, debutante daughter. However, while Bill Maitland lives this life he believes that he is fully aware of its emptiness and can treat the whole existence as a game. He achieves his elevation in the society by flaunting the values and morals and traditions as he beats its members at their own game. His elevated image is that of the trickster. At the end of the play, he consciously recognizes that the trickster has been tricked--Bill Maitland fails to transcend the society he scoffs at because he is actually comic in his acceptance of their values. His discovery elicits the usual Osborne acceptance and unforgiveness--factors in the comic world he finally embraces. In his elevation, he must not forgive his acceptance of guilt or even his unforgiveness of himself, but must accept it. Bill Maitland's final "self-imposed life sentence of isolation"⁴ is a fusion of his elevated trickster image with his real guilt (according to the norms of the society he tricks).

The dream sequence that begins the play presents Maitland's unconscious awareness of his comic stature. This dream motif focuses attention upon the disparity between the public image and the reality; as in the later plays, A Patriot for Me and A Place Calling Itself Rome, Osborne unmask the hero very early in the play. In the earlier plays

⁴Ferrar, John Osborne, p. 33.

the audience recognizes the incongruity of the hero's elevated stance often simultaneously with the hero, but the delayed awareness here is effected by the audience's engagement with the exuberance and vitality of the hero. With a hero seemingly as "establishment" as Bill Maitland, Osborne avoids pathos by highlighting the man behind the mask at the beginning of the play. (This structure elicits a more complex response in the later Brechtian history plays.)

The setting of the dream is the trial of Bill Maitland for "unlawfully and wickedly" publishing and making known and causing to be procured "a wicked, bawdy and scandalous object," "intending to vitiate and corrupt the morals of the liege subjects," "to debauch and poison the minds of divers of the liege subjects . . ." (p. 9). Bill is an object of scandal and concern⁵ in his dream. This concept synthesizes both his stance and his reality. As the trickster he is a scandal; as the man of society he should be concerned and punished. The dream presents Maitland defending himself against the charges. But from the outset he is sabotaging his case.⁶ His defense of himself (counter to the dictates of common sense) is the essential sabotage; then, he pleads not guilty while believing in his guilt. His defense-indictment is an affirmation of many of the standards of the society that the trickster mocks.

At the beginning of his testimony he seems to be the wily lawyer

⁵This phrase is suggested by one of Osborne's television plays, A Subject of Scandal and Concern (1961).

⁶Ferrar, John Osborne, p. 33.

who tries to deceive the judge about his beliefs. But the manner in which he states his normalcy is so outlandish (he "flails") and the statement itself is so off the issue that he cannot help knowing that it condemns him. In this flailing opening he states belief in "technological revolution," "the theme of change," "realistic-decisions based on a highly developed and professional study of society," "the inevitability of automation," "programme controlled machine tool line reassessment." All these affirmations pour out as he is being sworn in (pp. 10-11)! He even tries to avoid testimony by stressing his physical infirmity; he complains of poor vision and the loss of his pills.

When he begins his defense his mask begins to slip. Since he attempted to manipulate his swearing in into a defense, he must continue; therefore, since he starts first he will not have the last word. His strategy backfires. He opens his defense by recalling attention to his headache. His illnesses, from hangover to cancer of the thumb!, are used to excuse him from the games of trickster or to reinforce this image as they absolve him from guilt: "You pretend to be ill and ignorant just so you can escape reproach. You beggar and belittle your self just to get out of the game" (p. 114). The illnesses have both a conscious and unconscious origin. They are part of the controlled, pretense mask of the trickster. They are also manifestations of the guilt that he unconsciously feels; thus he gets out of the game. At the dream trial the dual and opposite functions of his illnesses merge. At the beginning of his defense the elevated trickster uses them to evoke sympathy from the court. By the end of the dream, when his mask has been

stripped away, he uses them to explain his "sudden" collapse. He begins his defense by trying to explain his headache's cause; he has a hangover since he is a "serious drinker." His explanation is a marvel of incongruity as he revels in his drunkenness and voices the society's view of it.

Oh, anyway, I'm what you'd call a serious drinker. . . . I can drink a whole bottle of whisky. Can't be any good for the heart, can it? It must be a strain, pumping all that fire and damned rigour and everything all out again? Still, I'm pretty strong. I must be. Otherwise, I couldn't take it. That is, if I can take it (p. 14).

As he realizes his disorientation he retreats to his hypochondria. He blames his poor performance upon his infirmity: "I could do a lot better, a lot better, that is acquit myself, acquit myself better" (p. 15). Before he continues his defense he tells the judge that he always expected this trial and has prepared for it. This statement emphasizes the manipulation and evilness of his trickster image; however, his performance negates the image.

He continues his defense with a confused narrative of his success (after reiterating the pain of his headache). He vacillates between assigning his success to trickster exuberance or to common mediocre channels. He is uncommitted although still successful in the law and unworthy to sit with a group of such brilliance. He is bright but "only tolerably bright", even "irredeemably mediocre" so that he has to really study and apply himself. He has a "certain facility" and "a quick mind, for getting fags and remembering things" and does not have a quick mind and "retain[s] very little." He has "a sort of dashing flair for making decisions" and is "by nature indecisive." These opposites unite a conscious public image as trickster and an unconscious private self-concept.

Unconsciously, he never believes his singular elevation. Consciously the elevated image is reinforced by other's: "I have to confess that: that I have depended almost entirely on other people's efforts" (pp. 16-9). He even states that he requires others to achieve his elevation; of course, this is true since any transcendence of an Osborne hero needs others to define it. However, Maitland sees that his singularity has deprived him of the certainty of human companionship; he has never been able to distinguish friends from enemies because a deceiving manipulator has neither one.

The dream ends with Bill's "confession" that the trial is some type of fulfilled destiny. Yet, the image Maitland presents is one of immersion into the society--the concern, not the vital scandal. His image of the prisoner is one devoid of material possessions; the trickster is debunked. The image also stresses the exterior and ignores the spirit.

Down to the cells. Off to the Scrubs, hand over your watch and your money, take all your clothes off, have a bath, get examined, take all your clothes off in the cold, and the door shut behind you (pp. 19-20).

The unmasking concludes with the trickster tricked not only by the society, but by himself. Bill expresses his desire for the non-material values of the society after he requests to stand down--pleading illness.

I never hoped or wished for anything more than to have the good fortune of friendship and the excitement and comfort of love and the love of women in particular. . . . I am not equal to any of it. But I can't escape it, I can't forget it. And I can't begin again (p. 20).

His final plea contrasts to the initial charge. In the indictment Bill is in control in his wickedness and vitality. As he is progressively

unmasked he reveals his lack of total control and his longing for common human alliance as well as societal censure. Lest we believe this request is part of his desire for sympathy, we might notice that his admission of the inevitability of his arrest is tantamount to an admission of guilt--hardly a successful legal strategem. Also, the request itself is followed by a "torpid moan" (p. 20) instead of theatrical flailing. Osborne characterizes Maitland's singularity with vitality and his comic immersion as almost inanimate and inhuman.

The action of the rest of the play is suggested in Bill's final plea. He says he wants the love and comfort of the comic community; yet, he feels he is unworthy. This is a reversed elevation similar to Archie Rice's. The last lines ("I can't begin again") of the plea focus on Bill's essential inflexibility. He will not compromise. The elevated image must exist along side of the guilt; immersion in the comic community must not efface his transcendence. The isolation of Bill at the end of the play is the result of this impasse. Maitland embraces the comic world which regards him as the scandal that needs punishment. But his acceptance is tempered by his final persistence in wearing the trickster's mask. He punishes himself for the transgressions of the trickster by forcing everyone to desert him (or believing that they have) using the methods of the trickster. The nature of his comic contest requires presentation of his self-condemnation in the dream and also presentation of his strategies of achieving castigation by a deceptive manipulation of others. Therefore, the play does not merely present a man being deserted by society as Trussler suggests.⁷

⁷Trussler, John Osborne, p. 21.

Nor would the play's monologues work better if there were no on-stage audience.⁸ Maitland's elevation and normalcy can only be juxtaposed by presenting his relationship to the real society. The picture of his society, in the law office, is also needed to stress his essential comic nature. The goals in his unconscious final plea are the real goals of his society.

The rest of the play presents the progressive unmasking of Maitland that the dream sequence implied. Until the beginning of Act II, the play is realistic showing Bill's trickster image in action. After this initial verification, Act II to the end of the play "progressively resemble[s] the feeling of dream and unreality of BILL'S giving 'evidence' at the beginning of Act I."

Some of the time it should all seem actually taking place at the particular moment, naturally, casual, lucid, unclouded. At others the grip of the dream grows tighter; . . . into a feeling of doubt as to whether there is anyone to speak to at all (p. 59).

Besides stressing the progression in the role that some critics do not notice ("monotony," "a play of extension, a long shivering line drawn from the point of departure. . . . play congeals"),⁹ the transition from reality to dream reinforces the personal nature of the conflict in the play--Maitland's society never condemns him and seeks to punish him. He only believes he is of concern to the society because, using their value system, he is guilty. Ironically, the society would probably

⁸Hayman, John Osborne, p. 105.

⁹Walter Kerr, "Kerr Reviews 'Inadmissible Evidence'," New York Herald Tribune, 1 December 1965 in New York Theatre Critics' Review, pp. 240-1.

never indict him since his trickster wiliness and manipulation is so successful. He is a subject of scandal and concern only to himself. The evidence in the play is inadmissible because there is no trial!

Maitland's confrontations proceed from those with his most public associates to those with his most private ones, from chief clerk to mistress. Generally, the other characters are portrayed possessing all the qualities that Bill seeks, but he cannot extend himself to them. After he awakens, on his feet, from the dream, Maitland the trickster prevails in the office. When he is not able to completely manipulate his employees, he retreats to his illnesses. In his morning discussion with Hudson, Shirley and Joy, he is the glib lecher, societal critic, and proud expert and critic on law:

Well something's made you [Shirley] bad tempered this morning, and I don't believe that languid pipe cleaner of an accountant you're engaged to has got that much lead in his pencil (p. 22).

Look at that beautiful bottom. Don't go much on her [Joy, the receptionist's] face. But the way her skirt stretches over that little bum. You could stick a bus ticket in there (p. 31).

[The clerk Jones would] make a great witness wouldn't he? I wouldn't like to see you in the box up against someone like old Winters. . . . He's a tent peg. Made in England. To be knocked into the ground. That sounds like every supine, cautious, young husband all about six degrees under proper consciousness in the land. The whole bloody island's blocked with those flatulent, purblind, mating weasels (p. 24).

He's got all the makings of a good, happy, democratic underdog . . . (p. 27).

They'll need no more lawyers. . . . (Bangs newspaper.) Look at this dozy bastard: Britain's position in the world. Screw that. What about my position? Vote wheedling catchfart, just waiting to get us into his bag and turn us out into a lot of little technological dogs turning his wheel spit of endless blood consumption and production (p. 29).

She's [Mrs. Garnsey, a client] probably one too. They: are the

people who go up every year like it was holy communion to have a look at the Christmas decorations in Regent Street (p. 25).

HUDSON: Sometimes I'd like to see you and old Winters [the judge] have a go at each other in court. I think you'd enjoy that.

BILL: Don't think I couldn't, either. He's not all that good. Just because he wears a wig and I don't. . . . I don't think the law is respectable at all (p. 25).

His exhilaration continues through a discussion with the conservative Hudson about his divorce clients' idiosyncrasies. In the discussion Bill always admires or sides with the party who is wrong according to societal norms. They then discuss his mistress and his wife and two children. But at the mention of his relationship to others and at his imagined disapproval from Hudson ("There's never any doubt which side you're on."), Bill's defiance becomes apology.¹⁰

I have tried not to cause pain . . . I ought to be able to give a better account of myself. But I don't seem to be functioning properly. I don't seem to retain anything, . . . They used to say I had a quick brain. . . . I have a very small, sluggish, slow moving brain (p. 40).

Bill's self-castigation is self-induced. Hudson, the judge in the dream, really does not accuse him. As a matter of fact, Hudson seems to almost admire his "performance." Although Bill has expressed some guilt about his "account," when he is offered the opportunity to gain the love and friendship he seems to purposely rebuke it. Osborne presents Bill in private conversation, as opposed to the circus arena of his outer

¹⁰Robert Brustein, The Third Theatre (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), p. 146. Brustein believes that this phrase applies to all of the plays and all of the heroes. I believe it is only applicable in Inadmissible Evidence.

office, with his on-stage audience, with Shirley, the pregnant office girl, and Mrs. Garnsey. Both of these discussions take place after Bill telephones his "forgiving" wife, in Hudson's presence. Strangely enough he is no longer as self-assured after his "apology" to Hudson about his marital relationship even though the apology is followed by a glib diatribe against his family. We see him retreat to his illness. But instead of using it to totally manipulate Anna so that he can week-end with his mistress, he uses his condition to effect no communication at all: "I can't hear you very well. . . . oh, headache, . . . yes, the usual only a bit worse . . . " (pp. 43-4).

In his conversation with Shirley, Bill refuses to extend himself and offer any human warmth to her. Shirley is pregnant and is going to leave and marry her clerk-accountant fiancé. Up to three months before the play opens she has been Bill's playmate. However, he has merely treated her like the devil-may-care trickster who was not only manipulating her but clients simultaneously.

SHIRLEY: One weekend in Leicester on client's business. Two week-ends in Southbend on client's business. . . . Four days in Hamburg on client's business. One crummy client's crummy flat in Chiswick. And three times on this floor. . . . your promising me for your clients when you're too busy with your wife or that Mrs [sic] Eaves his official mistress . . . (p. 49).

Bill does not alter this treatment after he learns of her pregnancy and genuine discomfort. Instead of extending himself for the "friendship" which is his goal, he offers money and a disavowal of any responsibility:

I don't think I let you think it was an enduring love affair--in the sense of well of endless, wheedling obligations and summonses and things. But, if you think back on it, detail by detail, I don't think you can say it was fraudulent. Can you?

The legal terminology sounds the same false note as Bill's opening speech in the dream sequence. A specious defense. Yet, he has not been accused, except by himself. After this bit of sophistry in lieu of concern, Bill states that he fears Shirley's dispossession of their relationship: "You can't disown it. If you do that, you are helping, you are conspiring to kill me." This fear is ambiguous. Verification of his lack of guilt is needed for his defense. But since the lack of guilt in the affair is allied to his trickster image, dispossession will cancel the need for a defense. However, it will also negate Bill Maitland. As he accepts his guilt, he must cling to his transcendent image (p. 49).

Before the arrival of Mrs. Garnsey, Bill asks Hudson to become a partner in the firm. "(HUDSON seems to react rather pleasurably[p. 50].)" This stage direction is important because in the Second Act reality-dream fusion Bill feels that Hudson has gone to another firm when actually he appears to have only gone for the night. Bill's promotion of Hudson is less desire for friendship and union with his "judge" than his desire for an elevated image. The trickster uses whoever he can to reinforce his position. Hudson is a definite asset to the office; he seems to handle a lion's share of the cases. When Bill finally believes that Hudson has deserted him, he is actually condemning this elevation. Bill's belief isolates him, like a prisoner, after the judge has banished him.

Bill talks to his mistress, Liz Eaves, and keeps his client waiting. The telephone-monologue differs from his conversation with his wife. Liz doesn't give Bill a chance to use his illness to isolate

himself. She asks him about his condition as well as his relationship to his wife. Because she does not allow his pretense he is able to articulate the nature of his ambiguous self-concept:

I just felt everyone was cutting me . . . cutting me . . . I know, I should care! I like them as much as they like me. . . . I don't know whether they're more afraid than I am. . . . I don't exactly do my best do I. . . . But it seemed at my expense this time, it seemed to be out of me . . . as if they were disowning me . . . (pp. 52-3).

Liz's recognition of the ambivalence in Bill's character seems to be coupled with love and concern.

Mrs. Garnsey is the prototype of several women (Mrs. Tonks and Mrs. Anderson) clients in the play, all played by the same actress. In the scene with Mrs. Garnsey Bill is "paralysed" (p. 55) by her story. He cannot comfort her, and so she leaves. What arrests Bill in her story is that she still cares for her wastrel, adulterous husband. This husband is a mirror image of Bill's self-image: a man who is sensitive, clever, charming, and who "disappoints himself" so much that "he is being hurt" by everyone who censures him. She is leaving her husband because she "can't bear to see him rejected and laughed and scorned behind his back and ignored" (p. 54-5). The husband's condition stuns Bill so much that his glib tongue is inoperative. The image of the punished alone wastrel merely reinforces Bill's apprehensions. However, Bill is also stunned in his recognition of the real love that the man has; there can be a synthesis of his image and his goals. He can be the trickster who is loved. Mr. Garnsey is not brought before the bar for his conduct, nor is he imprisoned. He is merely divorced. But Bill's self-image cannot allow his elevation to be obliterated in amelioration

through the love of others (he has a wife and a mistress). Bill can accept the value system of the society; he wants love and friendship. He cannot give up his elevation to achieve the goal. Bill Maitland resembles the other Osborne heroes in their inability to compromise their conscious transcendence even though it is illusory. They would rather embrace both illusion and reality into a synthesis that does not obliterate the essence of either one. So Act One ends with Bill rejecting the love and acceptance that Liz can offer. "Tell her: to expect me when she sees me" (p. 57). He reinforces his debauchery with Joy.

During the reality-dream Osborne states that whether Bill is a scandal or a concern he is essentially alternating these images himself.

He trails back and forth between lucidity and near off-handedness and fumbling and fear and addressing himself. Some jokes are addressed to himself, some bravado is deflated to himself, some is dialogue between real people. The telephone is stalked, abused, taken for granted, fear. Most of all the fear of being cut off, of no sound from either end (p. 63).

In Bill's first telephone conversation with Liz he explains the fear that stunned him with Mrs. Garnsey as he describes a cocktail party that he attended with his wife. "I'm frightened. . . . It was as if I only existed because she allowed me to, but if she turned off the switch . . . turned off the switch . . . who knows?" (p. 62). Bill cannot accept the loss of identity involved in his wife's pitying love. Immediately after this statement he mentions Mrs. Garnsey, who Liz cannot possibly know. Except for the admission of his fear of real immersion into the community his conversation proceeds in his best jaded manner. When he finally finishes the "conversation" he checks the phones to make sure they are alive. The phones offer him an audience

for his transcendent image. He fears losing this audience since they keep his elevation alive. While he seeks them he is moving beyond them.

During his conversation with Anna (who found him with Joy on the office floor) Bill casts her as Mrs. Garnsey to his Mr. Garnsey. Through this casting he attempts to insure his isolation:

It's just that the more they despise me the more admirable and courageous and decent spirited you become [these are almost the same words Mrs. Garnsey uses to describe herself]. . . . No, I'll not leave you. . . . you are leaving me . . . (p. 64).

He continues his peculiar type of elevation as he insults her and seems very worldly and amoral: "must you always say 'mistress'? It's a very melodramatic word for a very commonplace archetype . . . you make it sound like a pterodactyl who gives you lung cancer . . . " (p. 64).

This glibness is present as he speaks to his daughter, also. However, during all three of these conversations, whenever he is challenged, he retreats to illness to absolve himself from the abrasiveness of the trickster.

This strategy of retreat is also apparent when he redials his mistress and declines to meet her because he has cancer of the thumb and "it's going to be a day." He does, however, keep her on the hook; he asks her to wait for him. The illusory nature of his elevation is further revealed when Joy comments on her real promiscuity: "I want to have sex constantly" (p. 72). Bill is thereby offered another, but different, reprieve from his concern about being a scandalous object. But Bill cannot accept her value system and her candor and admits his fear. He also asks her to be on "standby," like Liz.

His rejection of Joy's pardoning of promiscuity effects his con-

scious reversal in the next scene. Bill is a reflector of society's values in his conversation with Hudson and Jones. Instead of the wastrel and lecher, he articulates such ideals as respectability, patriotism, optimism. He completely reassesses Jones as one who is "solid but forward looking," with a "sense of purpose and looking forward to the new frontiers of knowledge." This description contrasts with Osborne's stage direction that Jones "looks dull" (p. 73). In the scene with Hudson and Jones (the clerk in the initial dream sequence) Bill also is the ultimate hard-working lawyer. However, his ambivalence about this about-face is suggested when he defends a homosexual whom Jones criticizes. Bill articulates his values cryptically: "I like the sound of Maples. Better than I like Piffords the respectable law firm " (p. 76). Yet, immediately after this declaration, he expresses the fear of public censure that the dream sequence presented. From this point in the play he is no longer able to completely slip into his elevated, detached debauchery. He seeks to punish and isolate himself from all who have been part of his life--his clients, co-workers, family and mistress.

The three clients, two women played by the same actress as Mrs. Garnsey, and Mr. Maples do not "mirror" Bill's "own inadequacies" as Trussler suggests.¹¹ With the two women, as with Mrs. Garnsey, Bill sees himself in their husbands--all men who have somehow transgressed the "norms" of society. With Mrs. Tonks Bill actually reads her husband's statements thereby achieving the identification with him. With Mrs. Anderson, Bill only picks up key words that cause him to remember

¹¹Trussler, John Osborne, p. 21.

his own marriage. Bill's reading with Mrs. Tonks points to the conscious nature of his elevated image. Mrs. Tonks accuses her husband of sexual excesses; her husband denies it and also portrays himself as the sometimes impotent spouse of a frigid wife who was forced into his affairs. With Bill reading Mr. Tonks' words the stage image is Bill defending himself against the original charges in the dream. But with Mrs. Anderson Bill seems more offensive than defensive. He accuses Mrs. Anderson of frigidity and of demanding a love that will only make her "like some gasping, grateful, stupid dog" (p. 84). During the scene with Mrs. Anderson he also invisions himself with his wife dead and himself free to be quite ordinary. The implication is that the prospect of love's dehumanizing and the non-vitality of the marital relationship have caused his stance of the trickster. Without these threats to his individual vitality he might be quite normal and mediocre.

Before Mr. Maples explains his arrest Bill calls Winters and believes that he is being slighted when the Judge cannot speak to him. Bill also believes that Hudson is in collusion with the Judge. He later sends Joy away. He relates all of this to Liz on the phone. Liz merely reminds him of their weekend. When Maples relates his life story--his marriage, his homosexual liaisons, his entrapment by an undercover policeman--Bill advises him to plead guilty at first because it "has the advantage of certainty" (p. 97). Bill sees himself in Maples: "You feel you are gradually being deserted and isolated, . . . it's inhuman to be expected to be capable of giving a decent account of oneself" (p. 92). But after he hears the entire story, including Maples'

liason with a male friend in the back of the car that the friend's wife was driving, Bill recants and decides to fight even though the Q. C. "is sure to apply the full rigour of the law and send [them] both . . . down" (p. 99). He seems to admire the flaunting of convention. The man refuses to plead anything but "guilty." He actually wants punishment since he fell into quite an obvious police trap. He is thereby an exemplar to Bill who seeks to punish himself even more actively.

In his talk with his daughter, which one critic calls his "most eloquent diatribe,"¹² Bill punishes himself by alienating her (who he realizes he has lost even though he loves her the most.) with his criticism of her cool, sensible, and stylish manner. He juxtaposes her manner to his "fibbing, mumping, pinched little worm of energy." He characterizes her as unselfconscious and guiltless, while he is neither. Yet as he criticizes her love and kindness as coldness and inhumanity he finally affirms the values of the society he sees in her, and his female clients: "God said, . . . Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth. And subdue it. . . . you are on your way at last, all, to doing all four of them. . . . Go on now" (pp. 105-7). Part of the subduing is the guilt that controls him with its certainty. The tone of the speech is the Osborne acceptance without forgiveness.

The comic impasse reached with his daughter is developed in the play's final scene with Liz. Liz correctly assesses Bill's concept of guilt and that he cannot accept her love and remain himself; she knows

¹²Gordon Rogoff, "Richard's Himself Again: Journey to an Actors' Theatre," p. 31.

he wants to be alone. During the scene Bill's abrasive trickster image rejects her concern and her genuine acceptance of whatever he is. Liz believes that guilt cannot exist with self-knowledge. Bill, proclaims his love for her, such as it is, but states that "There's no place for me here" (p. 113). That tragic declaration is totally comic. Bill Maitland cannot be tragic. He is not making, as Gilman suggests, an "outcry of protest against what cannot be helped."¹³ Osborne offers Bill several solutions in the play--especially Liz, who would accept him without enveloping him in guilt. There is also Anna; although Bill believes she has in some way caused the creation of the "scandalous object" she is less malevolent than simply cool and icily kind and forgiving. These are virtues in the society--Bill chooses his isolation. This is, therefore, not a play that "parades the trappings of tragedy with an empty heart."¹⁴ Bill's heart is not empty--just ambivalent. He also is dependent upon the society for his elevation. Consequently, after Liz leaves, he phones Anna to tell her that he is waiting in the office for someone to come and accuse him. He embraces the society and his societal mores as facts of his existence that are inimicably united with his self-conscious worm of energy.

Although most of the critics of the play recognize the "self-lacerating"¹⁵ nature of Bill's conflict, they so emphasize this quality

¹³Richard Gilman, Common and Uncommon Masks: Writings on the Theatre 1961-1970 (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 114.

¹⁴Douglas Watt, "Osborne's 'Inadmissible Evidence' Story of a Solicitor in Collapse," Daily News, 1 December 1965 New York Theatre Critics' Review, p. 242.

¹⁵Brustein, The Third Theatre, p. 146.

that Bill becomes a whining nobody in their eyes. The chief complaint about the play is that, unlike Osborne's other angry men, Bill Maitland does not seem worthy of attention; there is no one to "feel" about.¹⁶ Part of this antipathy for Bill may be alleviated as we realize that there are nuances in his "whining." Osborne also makes us feel for Maitland as we realize that the guilt he accepts is part of the society's morality. His exuberance originated from a real human need that the society could not fulfill. Our response to Bill Maitland is similar to that of all Osborne's heroes: we pity their immersion in our society; we admire their exuberant inability to betray themselves in a world that offers failure and unhappiness for them.

¹⁶Laurence Kitchen, Drama in the Sixties: Form and Interpretation (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p. 190.

CHAPTER VII

DRAWING-ROOM IRONIC COMEDY--TIME PRESENT,

THE HOTEL IN AMSTERDAM AND

WEST OF SUEZ

The three plays written after A Patriot for Me present an English society no longer cohesive in its negative values of materialism, royalty religion, and sterile human rituals. In Time Present, The Hotel in Amsterdam and West of Suez¹ the English society is fragmented into economic, intellectual, political, and generational factions. The vacuity of the society that pervades Osborne's early English plays is missing. In these later plays the tenor of the society is discordant; the Englishman's reaction is bafflement. This altered image of the English society in Osborne's plays is the effect of the altered condition in the real society. The England of the late 1950's and early 1960's was plagued by the problems of socialization. To Osborne these problems eroded real values in favor of material ones. With the absence of present values, some of the Osborne heroes looked toward vestiges of the old classed society to fill the void. However, the common man chose mostly the materialistic past values to augment his life--royalty religion, etc. The world outside of England was virtually forgotten--

¹John Osborne, West of Suez, Time Present, The Hotel in Amsterdam in West of Suez, A Patriot for Me, Time Present, The Hotel in Amsterdam: Four Plays by John Osborne (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1973). All subsequent references from these plays will be in the text.

except in moments of crisis (the Suez canal). His early rebels created a fuss to enliven the vapid lumpen society.

However, by 1967 everyone was creating a fuss over such important public issues as genocide, colonization, Castro, Vietnam. The methods of creating the fuss were perhaps more exuberant than the earlier heroes' mere words. There were drugs, protest rallies, pickets. The private life of the Englishman became suspect in its emptiness. The Age of Aquarius ushered in "free" sex, communes, abortion clinics, and women's liberation with equal exuberance. Protest and social awareness were staples of the society. At least the appearance of protest was. Consequently, the comic dialectic of the Osborne hero had to undergo surface but not essential changes. Whereas the heroes of the last two history plays, A Patriot for Me and A Place Calling Itself Rome, resort to transcendent controlled stances in their analogous tumultuous societies, the Osborne heroes in the plays written between 1968-1971 do not. Alfred Redl and Coriolanus derive their ethical codes from the societal norms that were operative immediately before the situation of the plays. Austria Hungary in 1903 and Coriolanus' Rome are societies at points of transition from the fixed to the chaotic. However, England in the late '60's and early '70's is not at the junction of the pivot. It is part of what Osborne terms a "'headlong rush into the twentieth century.'" The Osborne hero of 1968 simply cannot look to the past (as Jimmy Porter does) to establish his elevation. The hero's immediate past would be the lumpen society that the earlier heroes rejected. Consequently, the heroes in these later plays achieve transcendence in detachment. This detachment is not synonymous with Archie Rice's moral

turpitude. Instead it is the antonym of the "'unreal sort of medium hysteria'" that Osborne sees going on in the country. The detachment of the later heroes reflects Osborne's own solution to the fragmentation of the society: "'My instinct . . . is to lower the temperature rather than raise it, . . . If anything, it needs a bromide.'"² The detachment not only contrasts to the tenor of the society but also to its factiousness. Osborne notes--

"'What am I?' is a much more interesting question than 'What are we?' But now they're all 'we-ing' all over the place. And acting as groups, which I find uninteresting and ugly."³

Originally Osborne intended to produce Time Present and The Hotel in Amsterdam with a "modern version of Coriolanus set in an African Republic."⁴ However, the plan was abandoned because of real trouble in African Republics; Coriolanus was shelved until 1973. The two remaining plays opened two months apart at the Royal Court and were transferred to the West End where they ran simultaneously.⁵ One can see in the setting of West of Suez the germ of the original plan; the location of the play is an Afro-European sub-tropical island where a revolt is in progress. When Osborne finally completed A Place Calling Itself Rome he consequently had no need to transfer the setting to a modern locale, especially with the allusive powers of the Brechtian epic theatre.

²Quoted in John Lahr, "John Osborne: Poor Johnny One-Note," Up Against the Fourth Wall: Essays on Modern Theater (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1970), p. 239.

³"Osborne and Tynan on Life," p. 5.

⁴Hayman, John Osborne, p. 113.

⁵Ibid.

Hayman states that the original trio was to be presented "almost in the manner of a retrospective exhibition. Or, at least, as a near to mid-way pause [emphasis mine]." ⁶ Osborne thereby stresses the detached and aloof qualities of the plays in contrast to the specious awareness of the society. A contemporary review of the plays states that the unobtrusive joint title of the plays, For the Meantime, indicates that they are "plays for a time that is mean, which permits nothing larger or more generous." ⁷ If Osborne were such a raving revolutionary these times of social turmoil would surely be as large and as generous as he could hope for. However, the sub-title indicates that Osborne is suspicious of the quantity of the protest (it is mean in its useless frenetic activity) as well as the moral quality (it is mean in its essentially self-serving purpose).

The dramatic form of all three later plays reinforces the elevated image of the heroes. Each play is a basic drawing-room conversation play. The claustrophobia of the drawing room presents the heroes detached from the English society. In two of the plays, The Hotel in Amsterdam and West of Suez, the isolation is coupled with a removal from England; Amsterdam and a fictitious Afro-European subtropical island are the settings. Yet, in light of Osborne's past technical innovations, the forms of these plays seem strangely superannuated. One critic states that in the first play, Time Present, "Osborne comes as

⁶Ibid.

⁷"'The Hotel in Amsterdam'--Comradely malice? . . .," Atlas, 16 (September 1968): 59.

near as possible for him to writing a run-of-the-mill play," He compares him to Philip Barry.⁸ Carter mentions that comparing The Hotel in Amsterdam to Noel Coward's Design for Living is a common critical stance.⁹ These plays do seem to derive from a high comedy technique reminiscent of Barry, Coward, and Anouilh. Osborne even describes his theatre as succeeding from the same tradition as the French dramatist: "'My line in the theatre is clearly a literate one. It even comes out of the French window tradition--or rather through the green baize door and the servants' quarters'"¹⁰

However, Osborne's three plays differ from the high comedy that they seem to imitate. The characteristics of high comedy emphasize the wit of the dialogue, the philosophic detachment, the intellectual appeal and the lack of compromise of the leading character who effects the ending on his own terms. Osborne's plays are ironic comedies: the wit of the dialogue is flawed because the philosophic detachment of the heroes is only a conscious posture; the final plight of the characters comes in spite of their ingenuity, not because of it--they are all finally immersed in the society they abhor; although there is no emotional compromise there is acceptance of the "term" of the society; the appeal is both emotional and intellectual. The major criticism of the plays applies the criteria of high comedy to them and finds them lacking in the scintillating wit. Most critics of these plays find them boring

⁸"'Time Present'--The star's 'wonderfully bitchy'," Atlas, 16 (September 1968): 58.

⁹Carter, John Osborne, p. 105.

¹⁰"John Osborne and the Boys at the Ball," p. 5.

and desultory. Lahr's statement is a paradigm of this criticism:

In both new plays, Osborne just lets his people talk. . . . Osborne forgets that one cannot create a sense of disorder with disorder--that is merely chaos; nor can one find a valid metaphor for middle-class ennui by having a fundamentally boring experience served up for the audience.¹¹

It must be admitted that some of this statement is just. On the stage there is simply too little happening to completely engage the audience. In contrast to this atmosphere any action seems contrived and overdone. Each of the plays has some almost incongruous melodramatic action: off-stage deaths related through phone calls, on-stage deaths. The basic dearth of action in the plays is part of Osborne's antipathy for the Happenings, light-shows, mixed-media experiments or nonliterate theatre of the time. Osborne, for once, refuses to step on a popular bandwagon. He related the popular theatrical form to the society's tumult.

"I'm completely unsympathetic to all that [the various nonliterate forms], because I'm committed to the written word. It seems like democracy gone mad. . . . I think these new forms of theatre may supplant--are supplanting--what I do. There may be a case for them, but I don't see it, and I don't want to see it."¹²

More than any other of the plays, Time Present, The Hotel in Amsterdam, and West of Suez depend upon the "conversation" for their movement. This conversation presents the comic dialectic somewhat representationally, but not in a desultory manner. The technique is actually closer to Chekhov than high-comedy dramatists like Anouilh or Barry. Through the seemingly random dialogue the Osborne hero comes to a realization of his real membership in the cacophonous society and re-

¹¹Lahr, "Poor Johnny One-Note," p. 243.

¹²"Osborne and Tynan on Life," p. 4.

acts to the discovery with the usual defiant submission. This movement in the play is straight and progressive. The conversation also presents the constancy of the elevated stance of detachment of the heroes even in the throes of defeat in the society. Even though Osborne seems to be merely representational or naturalistic in his picture of the middle-class ennui, it must be remembered that ennui is a transcendent pose in the plays; an empty frenetic activity is the reality. The action that seems so contrived actually presents the encroachment of the reality upon the detached transcendence. The picture of boredom that seems so real is actually a pose.

Therefore, most of the criticized elements of the plays can be justified as a part of a representational picture of the comic dialectic between the appearance or transcendent stance, and the reality. What seems desultory in the play is actually constant, consistent, and progressive. What seems a picture of ennui is actually a frenetic attempt to disguise the real involvement in the society. Yet, the charge of "boring" is more difficult to assuage. Some audiences find Chekhov boring, perhaps for some of the same reasons! Yet, these last plays lack one of the essential ingredients of a Chekhov play--a fully orchestrated cast. Critics have constantly lambasted Osborne's non-realistic presentation of the supporting characters in his plays. For the most part this criticism is valid in a realistic context but invalid in the context of the Osborne plays which are more presentational than representational. And even in his representational naturalism the unilateral supporting character is part of the thesis of the play. Besides, the vituperative energy, the "simple effort" of the heroes is usually enough to engage

the audience. (Remember the critical furor over Redl's characterization in A Patriot for Me.) However, since the context of the three plays is essentially realistic (although the conversation is naturalistic) the criticism of the unreality of the subordinate characters can be applied, in varying degrees, to the three plays. The characters who are so committed react almost too passively to the criticism of the "detached" heroes. In this respect Osborne develops; for in each successive play the hero is surrounded by more real characters until Gilman in West of Suez is not even introduced until the play is half over.

As this concession to realism removes the onus of the audience response from one character it also tempers the usual audience response. Like Brecht, Osborne's English audience came to expect the presentation of "'entertainment and the tilting at things'"¹³ The emotional response to the plays was often elicited before the presentation of the plays themselves. Osborne's plays had a stock response. With the removal of the spectacle and the concentration on conversational nuance the audience is less able to be totally engaged by the hero. The audience is still required to feel because of the same comic dialectic of the earlier plays; but now Osborne elicits an equal intellectual response. This technique is similarly used in the play immediately before the trio, A Patriot for Me, in 1965.

In Time Present a semi-employed thirtyish actress, Pamela, is living with a woman M.P., Constance, after both have suffered disas-

¹³ John Osborne quoted in "Osborne Belies 'Angry Man' Tag. British Writer's Latest Play Hailed in Philadelphia," p. 128.

trous marriages. At the opening of the play Pamela's mother and step-sister are at the apartment while she holds vigil in the hospital over her dying father Gideon Orme--a once illustrious actor. Pamela comes home during Act One and converses with her mother, step-sister, roommate, and the roommate's gentleman friend and playwright, Murray. The act ends with a phone call announcing the death of the father. In Act Two, some weeks later, Pamela is in the apartment even refusing to attend the "vulgar" memorial for her father. But her hibernation must end since she has managed to become pregnant by Murray. She calls her homosexual agent, Bernard, to arrange an abortion through one of the Ladies' Services, in Murray's presence. Murray proffers no solice. She finally leaves the apartment to go to Bernard's villa in the South of France--to join the society of "committed" actors that she detests.

In The Hotel in Amsterdam three couples escape from England to hole up in a first-class hotel suite in Amsterdam. They are all nearing forty and connected with the motion-picture industry. They are "escaping" an over-possesive, tyrannical producer, K. L., for the weekend. The action of The Hotel in Amsterdam is even less overt than that in Time Present. The first act delineates their attempts to select the bedrooms for each of the three couples (Gus and Annie, Laurie and Margaret, Don and Amy), to choose a restaurant, to establish an itinerary, and, most importantly, to present a cohesive front. Act Two opens two evenings later with the group more relaxed but dreading the return to London and the wrath of K. L. Their elite circle is broken by the intrusion of Margaret's neurotic sister, Gillian, and the profession of love between Laurie (the Osborne hero) and Annie, Gus' wife. The play ends

with a telephone call announcing K. L.'s suicide in London. They prepare to return to London.

In West of Suez Wyatt Gillman and three of his daughters and their mates are visiting a fourth daughter, Robin, and her retired Brigadier husband at their villa on a subtropical island which is "neither Africa nor Europe, but some of both (p. 7)." West of Suez begins with scenes introducing Frederica and her pathologist husband, Edward and Mary, the only daughter with children, and her teacher husband Robert. Robin and the Brigadier enter and announce luncheon; the rest of the family then appears: Evangie, the intellectual unmarried daughter, Christopher, Wyatt's companion, and finally Wyatt himself. Luncheon begins after Alastair, a homosexual traveling hairdresser, and the morose, long-haired student, Jed, arrive with other habitants of the island. In Act Two, Wyatt and Lamb, both writers, converse before the arrival of Mrs. James, an interviewer. The interview between Wyatt and Mrs. James is quite lengthy. Afterwards two tourists enter--mistaking the villa for a curio shop and Wyatt exits for the beach. In Scene 2, "resentful-sounding music" pervades. Jed castigates the family's ennui and the revolution encroaches as several armed islanders come and shoot down the fleeing Wyatt.

The setting of each play is not only isolated from the English society but is also a model of bourgeois material success. In the latter two plays the settings are basically impersonal since they are sites of visits--a hotel suite and a villa (Osborne never takes the audience inside the villa). The aura of detachment is preserved in these settings by the rather impersonal furniture which reeks of material success. The

setting of Time Present preserves the air of estrangement from the society by juxtaposing Pamela's furnishings with Constance's. Constance is the ultimate woman of the 1960's: politically aware, socially and professionally successful, and sexually liberated. Constance's flat is "severe;" it is more "a working area than a place to lounge around" with "Scandinavian furniture and abstracts." Pamela's personality emerges with the images of "untidiness" ("records on the floor") and of the theatre ("an old poster. . . . NEW THEATRE, HULL. GIDEON ORME--MACBETH--WITH FULL LONDON CAST etc. . . . a rather faded production photograph of an ageing but powerful-looking actor in Shakespearian costume." Pamela's possessions present an image of almost careless, indifferent eccentricity ("Japanese lampshades, . . . a pile of expensive-looking clothes" [p. 177]) while Constance's professional M.P. image seems modish, cold and regimented.

Each main character of the plays is part of the world of entertainment. All are quite successful in this world. Osborne justifies his use of the same world in the plays by explaining that the entertainment world is no longer a "'closed metaphor'":

"nowdays almost everyone is tainted with show business. Dockers are interviewed in the streets, and writing a play about show-biz people isn't the kind of 'in' experience that it used to be. . . . We're all in show-biz now!"¹⁴

The occupation of the heroes presents the comic dialectic: in their professions they are essentially united to all members of society; in their ability to control their roles or masks they are elevated above

¹⁴"Osborne and Tynan on Life," p. 4.

the society. Their control of their real identity and membership in the society is the ultimate in detachment. For although the other members of the plays are also role-playing, they often do not recognize the artifice and/or cannot control it. The heroes all come to a recognition of their immersion in the chaos and seek to retain at least the image of aloof detachment, even though they know it is futile.¹⁵

Although each one of the three heroes, Pamela, Laurie, and Wyatt, wages the same comic battle to the same "draw" or impasse, each one's society is slightly different. Consequently, each one's elevated posturing is also different--they are "detached" from different factions of the chaotic society with its specious commitment; they are finally immersed in different whirlpools of chaos.

Pamela's life is bifurcated by the value system of her father and that of her contemporaries. Her roommate Constance, her step-sister and brother, Andrew and Pauline, and her mother are all immersed in the discordant comic rhythm of protest--whether political or personal. Among the public issues are the economic crises, Vietnam, and the Cuban-Castro situation. The private issues include women's liberation, sexual freedom, drugs. Even Pamela's fellow artists are involved in the protest; Abigail, a fellow actress, is constantly interviewed about the "Russian and Chinese doctrinal conflict" (p. 202); Constance's dramatist "friend," Murray, is free enough to have an affair with Pamela. Her father's value system is similar to many of Osborne's past systems

¹⁵ John Russell Brown in Theatre Language, p. 136 notes that "performers are in all [Osborne's] plays, in one guise or another." This is, of course, part of the Osborne hero's comic elevation.

--or at least the present's (1960's) image of them. Pamela sees in her father's values an elitism which includes being "particular about who visited him" (p. 187), and a series of maxims about what constitutes vulgarity. However, Pamela distills any materialism from the image of the past. She makes it the polar opposite of the present's tumult. She only adopts certain values of the past to reckon with the present. She eliminates any mention of values which would betray less than a blasé interest in any situation. She totally rejects any conduct of her mother because she has remarried into the echelons of the society. She also despises her mother's involvement and sexuality.

From her first appearance on the stage Pamela delineates her transcendence over her image of the society. She rejects its political concerns, sexuality, rituals, value system of education and success and membership in the show business that is the open metaphor.

CONSTANCE: Time is in short supply in the present.

PAMELA: Then we should keep it in its place. Whenever we can. Just because we can't win (p. 197).

Oh, I think about Vietnam. Not as much as you do. But I'm not giving any money away. . . . then I think of myself (p. 192).

She's Madam Distress Fund, my Mama. . . . mother's a bat, and, as for the kids, they're only half conscious most of the day or night . . . (p. 190).

[Pauline's "hippie boy friend"] writes a regular column --when he's not too high--for the farthest out paper. . . . thought London was on the way to being the leadingest place, round the clock city, oh and for freak-outs, cats, chicks, soul groups, and pushing things, like the senses as far as they will go (p. 188).

I can make out for myself even if the terrain is all married men, pooves and tarted up heteros head over heels about themselves (p. 209).

CONSTANCE: You're very perceptive.

PAMELA: I'm not perceptive. I'm just full of bias. And I'm uneducated. . . . I've never done anything very memorable (p. 197).

No, I'm not [Abigail]. But if I were, I'd be what I'm not--a whopping, enduring, ironclad, guaranteed star (p. 203)!

I don't for instance, feel that most things I do must be an improvement on what I did before. So much improvement--like sex. I don't think I'm probably particularly good at it (p. 204).

Well, kid yourself not. You're all of you in show business now. Everybody. Of course, Orme was never in show business. Books, politics, journalism, you're all banging the drum, all performers now (pp. 212-3).

In her rejection of the society's negative values she overlooks its positive ones. There is real friendship and concern proffered to Pamela by Constance and her mother, Edith. However, like all Osborne heroes, love and friendship is considered an effacing of individual elevation; Pamela regards it as an exemplar of the "we-ing" factiousness which she distains. "Yes, I believe in friendship, I believe in friendship, I believe in love. Just because I don't know how to doesn't mean I don't. I don't or can't (p. 192)." The coupling of the inability with the conscious stance is reminiscent of Bill Maitland's concept of love in Inadmissible Evidence. Pamela's image of love, her inability and distain, also serves to isolate her from the concerns of the society. But the isolation is actually illusory. When she articulates her code of conduct of detachment in the First Act, "I think: excessive effort is vulgar. . . . there's a certain grace in detachment," Constance retorts that her diatribes against the society do not sound detached; Pamela states that Constance has failed to detect "the content of tone of

voice" (p. 207). However, this is an obvious rationalization which indicates Pamela's "hysteria" at being one with the society is actually bringing her closer instead of farther away.

In most of Pamela's diatribes in Act One she does not substitute the values of the father for the present. She merely rejects the present. When she does use her father's system it is usually in trivial matters--her predilection for champagne. However in Act Two, after Orme's death and her off-stage seduction by Murray, Pamela's stance of detachment is more trivial in its subjects. Although she maintains her aloof stance, her previous serious subjects are almost sacred cows. Her concerns are now mostly external--using the value system of the past as she retreats from the present:

Orme would have hated the idea. I don't think he ever went to a memorial service in his life. . . . He'd have thought it very common (p. 219).

I think a sun tan is definitely vulgar. It's like dieting. That's vulgar. It's just uncollected effort (p. 221).

She decides to leave the apartment stating that she "shall manage" within her "own walls" (p. 224). When Murray discovers the reason for her leaving and states that he will inform Constance of their affair, Pamela rejects his plan as she cautions him to avoid giving in to Constance.

She was brought up on the principle of fulfilment in as many spheres as possible. As a statutory obligation There isn't any statutory level of fulfilment we're entitled to. . . . it leads to excess and deception. . . . Lust is o.k. by me. But not when it's ambitious and gluttonous and avaricious. Then it's vulgar. Very vulgar indeed (p. 231).

She delivers this detached warning after acknowledging her lack of detachment from the world of sexuality: "At least I've not dried up like an old prune after all" (p. 230). When Constance returns with the Dom

Perignon that Pamela considers so vulgar, they both drink it as Pamela announces her plans to go to Bernard's villa for the suntan which was earlier so common. To Pamela, Bernard is a member of a "pessure group" whose characteristics mirror the society, homosexuals: "as a group they are uniformly bitchy, envious, self-seeking, fickle and usually without passion" (p. 222). Yet, they are special members of the society since their lack of passion contrasts to the "love" ethic of the society as well as its committed activity. Pamela's union with them is part of her comic acceptance and emotional rejection. Her emotional rejection of her sexuality effects an acceptance of the non-passionate homosexuals. But she must also accept their basic societal characteristics as well.

After this announcement, Abigail (dressed like a man) enters with a gentleman friend. Whereas Pamela avoided confronting her in Act One, she now is civil to her. She also retracts much of the venom about Abigail's character and finally concedes that "she's alive in her way" and "isn't wooden" (p. 244). As she recognizes her fellowship in the society she retreats to the past in her father's book of theatrical cuttings. Throughout Act Two her retreat to the past indicates an unforgiving immersion in the comic community. Pamela's immersion in the society is complete; but, she maintains her elevated image until the end of the play. The conscious nature of her act is juxtaposed to Constance's phone call to Murray. Constance is crying freely over the loss of her friend and mentions Pamela's offer to teach her to cry without ruining her make-up; Pamela hides her grief.

The society in The Hotel in Amsterdam is similar to that in Time

Present, but not as "public." There are only passing mentions of the world situation and the state of the society. Much of the opening conversation presents Laurie, the leader of the six, wittily discussing the establishing of El Fag airline, "The Airlines that floats just for HIM" (p. 259)! However, the chief factions of the society that the six are escaping are their origins and their present success. With Laurie as spokesman they are declaring their detachment from their origins in the working class and the controlling power of success under the movie-mogul, K. L.

In the denunciation of the working class, K. L. and Dan both use the concept of the open "show-biz" metaphor. What they say about the movie industry applies to the society at large. The focus of their attack is their mothers.

[The working class is] an unlovable, whining, blackmailing shower.

[My mother's] got a very mean little face. Celebrates every effect, plays up all the time, to the gallery, do anything for anything. Self-involved, bullying. . . . I suppose you think her face is pitted by the cares of working-class life and bringing up her sons on National Assistance. Well, it isn't. She has that face there because there's a mean, grudging, grasping nature behind it (p. 257).

That's one thing . . . we've escaped from My relatives and all those layabout people I pay to look after us (p. 291).

They contrast their origins with those of Margaret whose parents are "nice, gentle, civilized, moderate" (p. 257); the emphasis is upon their aloof qualities.

Laurie's denunciation of K. L. stresses the frenetic quality of his type of show business. Again Laurie presents this type of show business as an open metaphor of the world.

The cock's crowed a bit too often for every one of us. And every-

one else. Those he's victimized at one time or another. Oh, he'll find another spare eunuch knocking around London. The world's full of hustlers and victims all beavering away to be pressed into K. L.'s service. Someone always wants to be useful or flattered or gulled or just plain whipped slowly to death or cast out into the knackers yard by King Sham (pp. 260-1).

As Laurie rejects K. L.'s and the society's chaos he disavows any association with it despite the fact that he is a success in that society. He elevates himself by the mere rejection of the value system. Like Pamela, he transcends because he is aware of the inhuman faces behind the masks in the entertainment world. He becomes even more singular in his ability to play the part. Laurie, like Pamela, also resorts to self-deprecation to extricate himself from the comic community which he terms a "chaos and rapacious timidity and scolding" (p. 275).

Laurie's value system in the play is to produce goods that are "aloof, materials shaped with precision, design, logical detail, cunning, formality" (p. 275). Because success in the society cannot yield these goods he rejects the talent that produces the success and becomes the detached self-critic. In this guise, he resembles Bill Maitland, although the role is played for a different audience. If Laurie can indicate that his success is a fluke of the irrational society and that he realizes this and is not taken in by its sham promises, he is truly aloof and in control. If he cannot produce the goods that mirror his detachment, he can create an aloof self. In this guise his talent is sham; ironically this effects elevation and comic immersion at the same time. This role requires conscious effort to distinguish him from the mindless society.

What I do, I get out of the air. Even if it's not so hot always, I put my little hand out there in that void, there, empty air. Look at it. It's like being a bleeding conjuror with no white tie and tails (pp. 266-7).

I'm afraid I usually need a drink. It's the only thing that burns it out. Need to weld my guts with a torch. Then about nine, it eases off. I read the post. Try to put off work. Have a so-called business lunch. That's a good waste of time. . . . I need the super quality high-thing stuff poured into my tank twice a day . . . Look at K. L. He's unstoppable, . . . (p. 269-70).

My dear Annie, it is difficult. I can't think of anything that comes easily. It's all difficult.

Yes, [I am] a plump, middle-aged, played-out grotesque (p. 268).

Laurie rejects K. L.'s control of his personal life. In order to extricate himself from K. L., and the society, he sets up a value system that eliminates the relationships of the society that yield commitment, responsibility and guilt. To detach himself from this value system he seeks an amoral world where one human being does not have to adjust to the mood or convenience of another. Unlike the other Osborne heroes Laurie seeks friendship and community; but it is a relationship without responsibility. It is a relationship without defined goals or commitment. It is a relationship that will elevate him from the society.

It's bloody unnatural. How often do you get six people as different as we all are still all together all friends and who all love each other. After all the things that have happened to us. Like success to some extent, making money--some of us. It's not bad. . . . Everyone's married couples nowadays. Thank heaven we're not that (p. 264).

[Gillian is] not one of us. . . . She wants to worry everybody (pp. 281-2).

[Gillian will] be . . . filling us up with guilt and damned responsibility. Damn her, we've just got together again, she's an odd man out, we haven't got time to take off for her coltish, barren, stiff-upper quivering lips and, and klart-on. Am I unsympathetic (p. 301)?

Much of Laurie's indecisiveness is related to his detachment from K. L.'s relationship with others. "I mean K. L.'s got a strong character. . .

Does it mean simply someone who can impose their will on others" (p. 295)?

This elevated stance is not the reality; the couples cannot escape K. L. or the world. In Act Two of The Hotel in Amsterdam, the audience learns that the only reason the three couples are so relaxed is that they've made those niggling decisions about dining and sight-seeing from K. L.'s list. Gillian arrives and brings the guilt and responsibility which has really pervaded Act One. Even as Laurie states that he is aloof from K. L.'s influence, the rancor of his denunciation of the mogul belies his real engagement with him. Immediately before K. L.'s suicide is announced Laurie professes his love for Annie, but he does this only after acknowledging his membership in the committed and "sham" society.

You live with someone for five, six years. And you begin to feel you don't know them. Perhaps you didn't make the right kind of effort. You have to make choices, adjustments, you have requirements to answer. . . . I was afraid to marry but afraid not to. . . . I'm not really promiscuous. I'm a moulting old bourgeois. I'm not very good at legerdemain affairs . . . (p. 306).

Although he recognizes the impossibility of his detachment, he also postures to the end. He actually states that he believes the six will be able to escape at another time; however, he announces this "plan" as he is controlled by the morality of the society, his marriage to Margaret, his public image and K. L.

In West of Suez the world of the former British colony is basically the same as in the earlier plays. Wyatt and his daughters affect a non-committal, non-responsible pose in a world which is seething with people who are "a very unappealing mixture of hysteria and lethargy,

brutality and sentimentality" (p. 62). This image of the society is verified by a lazy servant, the "resentful-sounding music in the distance" (p. 66) which finally materializes as the armed men who shoot Wyatt down, and in Jed's speech immediately before this shooting. Jed is an American student who summarizes the societal value system which is rushing into the twentieth century; he verifies Wyatt's image of the society not only in what he says, but also in his manner of expression. His speech is a marvel of irrationality, non-communicative profanity, and empty commitment to the future.

I'm not interested in your arguments, not that they are, of your so-called memories and all that pathetic shit. The only thing that matters, man is blood, man. . . . All I see, and I laugh when I see it, man, I laugh, is you pigs barbecued, barbecued in your own shit. We're yes, we're going to take over and don't you begin to forget it. . . . We count and we do, not like you, we really really do. . . words, even what I'm saying to you now, is going to be the first to go. . . . You can't even make love. . . . There's only one word left It's fuck, man. Fuck. . . . That's the last of the English for you babies. Or maybe shit. You think we're mother-fucking, stinking, yelling, shouting shits. Well, that's what we are, babies. . . . I just had an idea. Like that old prick writer there. Colonialism is the fornication of the twentieth century (pp. 69-70).

Thus Jed verifies Wyatt's image of society. This verification of a hero's concept of the society is really absent in the two earlier plays. Each of those plays focuses more upon the stance of the heroes. It does not matter whether their image of the society is correct or not. Even if homosexuals are not as negative as Pamela imagines, her comic immersion and unforgiveness is real to her. This lack of verification of the heroes' images of the society is a part of most Osborne plays. In West of Suez, Osborne presents the validity of Wyatt's image of the society because his detachment would seem more culpable to the English

audience. Pamela and Laurie are detached from their personal assessments of the society. Their detachment is private. Wyatt's aloofness is public because he is presented in the play as the representation and spokesman of those who reject the fragmented world. When the rush of time overtakes Wyatt at the end of the play, as he is shot, Edward's assessment of the event ends the play: "My God--they've shot the fox . . . " (p. 70).

This public nature of Wyatt's protest is delineated in his public interview. Pamela and Laurie are members of the world of entertainment, but we never see them practicing their craft in public. Wyatt's public image is presented as equal to his private reality since he converses with his children and a fellow writer, Lamb, before the interview with no perceptible tonal change. During the interview he notes that he deliberately adopts a public pose because "it makes life slightly more tolerable. The same applies to private life" (p. 60). This public-private pose is one of detached awareness of his lack of talent, his boredom and his social position. He even reiterates some of the assessments that Jed makes of him, but without the rancor: "I think I'm probably what my daughter Frederica says she is, just a lot of hot shit . . . blood, vanity, and a certain prowess" (p. 61). He is even detached enough to forecast his death, but without acceptance; in answer to what is his chief "dread" in life, Wyatt replies "Not death. But ludicrous death. And I also feel it in the air" (p. 64). When he finally runs away from the armed islanders instead of presenting an image of cowardice he seems to be affirming his belief that "some people are better than others" (p. 64) and that protest is "easy" while grief

"must be lived" (p. 60). In his conscious choice of death Wyatt rejects both the chaotic committed society and the transcendent stance which it causes. All three plays suggest that the true Utopia is a "place without pain, passion, or nobility. Where there is no hatred, boredom, or imperfection" (p. 59). Utopia is devoid of the values of either "system" because essentially both are merely masks as man, "a defect" (p. 59), strives for excellence. The transcendent value system affords individuality while the society merely allows the existence that lets actuality be. As in all Osborne plays, actuality wins, but not without grief. This is the comic impasse.

CHAPTER VIII

COMIC ACCEPTANCE IN THE THEATRE OF CRUELTY--

A SENSE OF DETACHMENT

In his "Second Manifesto" of "The Theatre of Cruelty" Artaud states that the theatre could provide what the public sought from "love, crime, drugs, war, or insurrection."

The Theatre of Cruelty has been created in order to restore to the theatre a passionate and convulsive conception of life, and it is in this sense of violent rigor and extreme condensation of scenic elements that the cruelty on which it is based must be understood.¹

This theatre is essentially literate; it is a theatre that is "in no thing, but makes use of everything--gestures, sounds, words, screams, light, darkness." It "rediscovers itself at precisely the point where the mind requires a language to express its manifestations."² To Artaud, cruelty is not merely gratuitous violent action; it is awareness. "It is a mistake to give the word 'cruelty' a meaning of merciless bloodshed and disinterested, gratuitous pursuit of physical suffering. . . . Cruelty is above all lucid. . . . There is no cruelty without consciousness and without the application of consciousness."³

Artaud's concept of theatre demands that the audience be immersed in the

¹Antonin Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, translated from the French by Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1958). p. 22.

²Ibid., p. 12.

³Ibid., p. 102.

theatrical experience to be truly conscious; they can not merely re-
pose.

The Happenings in the theatre of the late 1960's focused upon the audience involvement that Artaud and Pirandello introduced. This audience involvement is really not essentially different from Brecht's alienation effect; it merely posits a different type of audience. Where Brecht's audience was emotive and required the alienation effect to think about a play, Artaud's was coolly intellectual, almost somnambulant and disengaged. The goals of both theories is the same--real understanding and consciousness of the "process" of life. Both theatres are essentially presentational. In the Happening, the audience is engaged to the utmost; for they have to "come to terms" with what the stage presents. The Happening abandons the "rigid time structure of a play"; "much is left to chance and improvisation"; "boundaries between stage and auditorium, between illusion and reality, are far less clearly defined."⁴ The Happening is also part of the literate theatre, or it can be. Scenarios can be as rigid as deemed necessary with set speeches included. But the real forte of the Happening tends to be the gastic and the "three-dimensional poetic images." The literate expression of the meaning that Artaud believes should follow the images are usually eliminated to allow the audience to interpret the experience for themselves. Esslin states that the happenings in England are "anti-literary theatre of the most extreme kind."⁵

⁴Esslin, Reflections, p. 204.

⁵Ibid., p. 206.

Osborne concurs with Esslin's assessment. He states in 1969 that a "'nonliterate theatre [is] not very interesting. . . . very unsophisticated.'" He further declares that he has "'nothing to offer it. . . .'"⁶ Osborne's assessment of the "happening, light-shows, experiments with mixed media"⁷ influences his plays during the period from 1968 to 1971. His three plays during this period seem to be attempts to uphold the words that Osborne believes are his staples. "'I believe in words. It's as simple as that. I have to. Take those away, I've got nothing else. I'm stripped.'"⁸ Consequently, when Osborne's newest stage production, A Sense of Detachment,⁹ opened in London in December 1972, it seemed that the dramatist had capitulated. Critics variously termed the play a "Pirandello-like highwire act,"¹⁰ a "McLuhan" play where the "theatre is message,"¹¹ and a "weary and lackluster" experiment with form.¹²

On the surface A Sense of Detachment is just a Happening. Most of the usual devices of an Osborne play are missing: there is no hero;

⁶"John Osborne and the Boys at the Ball," p. 5.

⁷"Osborne and Tynan on Life," p. 4.

⁸"John Osborne and the Boys at the Ball," p. 5.

⁹John Osborne, A Sense of Detachment (London: Faber and Faber, 1973). All subsequent references to the play will be from this edition and will be given in the text.

¹⁰Pit, "A Sense of Detachment," New York Times, 5 December 1972.

¹¹Jesse Birnbaum, "The Audience as Victim: A Sense of Detachment by John Osborne," Time, December 25, 1972, p. 36.

¹²Robert Brustein, "London's Theatre Has the Flu, Too," New York Times, 11 February 1973, sec. 2, p. 19.

there are few speeches exhibiting his "customary bite";¹³ there is no real plot and, therefore, no comic contest that reaches impasse. Instead the play is full of the usual trappings of the Happening. With allusions to Pirandello, six characters (a chairman, chap, girl, older lady, father, and grandfather) enter a "virtually empty stage," "carrying light bentwood chairs" (p. 11). They immediately address the audience and are soon answered by three planted hecklers, a man in a stage box and shifting interrupters; one comes complete with a wife. During the play Osborne makes copious use of loud, blasting music which is usually stopped in "almost mid bar" (p. 45). The music accompanies slides projected on a screen at the back of the stage. The lights are constantly snapped on and off during the performance to present the slides. The actors dance, sing, recite all types of poetry, read pornography, lecture about the Irish situation, women's liberation, and love. The music ranges from the Supremes and other pop groups to patriotic anthems and Elgar to Mahler, Beethoven, Handel and Mozart. The projection screen images include jet planes, marching British soldiers, pipers, lovers, miners, the Prime Minister, blinded and gassed soldiers, the roadway, the Union Jack.

It would be too simple to say that Osborne's use of the Happening is merely a formal experiment or only an indication of his theatrical opportunism. Osborne has always been fully aware of the state of the theatre and has used this knowledge to his advantage. Yet, rarely during his career has he only concentrated on the form of a play. In A

¹³Ibid.

Sense of Detachment there is no Osborne hero, but there is the Osborne comic context. There are six characters who are immersed in the English society as presented in the poems, songs, slides and music who react with the sense of detachment which Osborne suggests is necessary to cope with the fragmentation in that society. Osborne's Happening or theatre of cruelty does not replace the energy of drugs, love, and crime that Artaud's theatre seeks to accomplish; Osborne believes that that type of energy is specious in the society. Osborne seeks to present the energy of acceptance. Therefore, the play provides the lucid consciousness that was Artaud's ultimate product. The discovery that the Osborne play seeks to make is both the cruelty that Artaud defines as "the great pre-occupations and great essential passions" as well as the cruelty that Artaud resists presenting--"the economic, utilitarian, and technical streamlining of the world, . . . the patina of the pseudocivilized man."¹⁴ All of Osborne's plays present this world view: in the earlier plays the audience was to be engaged by the great passions of the heroes while they recognized the civilized world that the heroes "performed" in; in the later plays the audience was to be engaged by the dispassionate "pseudo" civilization of the heroes while they recognized the chaos that surrounded and eroded the heroes' transcendence. In A Sense of Detachment Osborne turns the Happening to his own use; instead of awakening the somnambulant audience that most Happenings confront Osborne's play confronts an audience similar to Brecht's emotive Germans. The English dramatist seeks to arrest the "committed" by effecting their recognition

¹⁴Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, p. 122.

of the fragmentation and tumult of the society. Recognition will lead to the detached acceptance that Osborne values over the mindless commitment.

The Theatre of Cruelty and the Happening are ultimately aimed at the audience who must sort out what has been presented as they are being blasted out of their stock response. Osborne posits an English audience in his play that is clearly too involved. There is a stock response to the Happening as a theatrical event among this type of audience. They no longer fear involvement in the experience and actually expect to be "awakened." But because there are essentially two disparate elements of the Happening, the gestic and the message, different factions of the audience anticipate different emphases. The involvement and the anticipation of the English audience troubles Osborne. "What is disturbing is the danger that the arts are following a familiar pattern of turning every man into a spectator who wants to be the referee, and change the rules to suit his idea of fun."¹⁵ As one of the most "popular arts"¹⁶ the theatre mirrors the factiousness of the society. Each faction demands that the art form present only his image of the world. In A Sense of Detachment Osborne presents the factions of the society through the actors and the planted audience. The real audience recognizes and accepts that their involvement in a chaotic and baffled society is such that their notions of rules are invalid.

As much of the control of the audience is achieved by the bogus

¹⁵ John Osborne, "Schoolmen of the Left," p. 17.

¹⁶ Ibid.

spectators as through the actors. The great difference between the man in the stage box and either one of the interrupters is representative of the fragmentation of the society. Each interrupter is one of the committed members of the society who insists upon relevance and the concept of progress. His rule for the theatre is that it be "something entertaining, but that leaves you with something to think about afterwards" (p. 29). He demands a movement in the play as well as a message. He himself is quite up-to-date on the state of the theatre: "Joan Littlewood did that years ago" (p. 28). He detests the singing, dancing and ribaldry but admires any talk of technology, statements from the youth, or debates about politics and social issues. At the end of the play he "boos and walks out" (p. 60). The box man is just as committed in his adamant aversion to progress or a message. He is an ordinary working-class man who eschews meaning and applauds gesture. He joins in the dirty jokes and the ribald poetry, makes passes at the girl, becomes "engaged" during the older lady's reading from the hardcore pornography. He is tipling during the play and actually sends ale down to the cast. The final song at the end of the play meets with his applause since he seems to have expected the play to be a music-hall revue.

The planted spectators are representational; they do not function as the usual Happening audience does. They are controlled and controlling. They have given lines and consistent stances. Even when the real audience responds¹⁷ they only mimic one or the other of their represen-

¹⁷Almost every review of the play indicates, as Birnbaum reports in "The Audience as Victim," p. 36, that on some "nights it is hard to

tatives. Osborne also maintains control of the happening audience because he uses the proscenium stage. Most Happenings surround the audience with lights, projections, and actors. Osborne's play separates the audience from the stage and the projections. Most of the time when the lights are on for the projections on stage it is dark in the audience. Only the music really surrounds them and it is usually played in blasts. The only consistent surrounding image is that of their representatives. As a matter of fact, Osborne even indicates that if there are real interruptions from the audience that the interrupter must speak for the audience and "return" any of the actors' retorts "with any of the following abusive lines" (p. 15). Osborne then lists several replies that are consistent with the interrupter's progressive committed spirit. The interrupter acts as spokesman to focus attention on a consistent faction of the society. The audience is not allowed to really experience and put it all together as in a Happening, since they will only activate their stock responses. By having the interrupter speak for them, taking words out of their mouths, Osborne presents the audience with their unthinking response.

During the play, music from a wide time and class spectrum is blasted, for the most part, only momentarily. One piece of music does not blast on and off. It is treated as an almost natural part of the events. "Cosi fan Tutte" is played because of its appropriateness to the poem read at the time, "The Rose Tree" by W. B. Yeats, and the "large rose" projected on the screen. The music plays for a short

distinguish between the paid actors planted in the audience and the victims--the paying customers."

while but fades: it does not abruptly terminate. The source of this selection which receives a slightly special treatment is an opera that presents the comic world and the sense of detachment. Hoy states that the opera demonstrates comic acceptance and forgiveness. He presents a translation of da Pont's libretto which can emphasize the detachment that Osborne suggests will follow recognition of the fragmentation of the society.

[Final Chorus]: "Happy the man who accepts life as it really is, and in all its ups and downs takes a reasonable view; who can laugh when others weep and finds peace in the midst of the world's tumult!"¹⁸

Throughout the play Osborne presents the audience with life as it really is--tumultuous, ironic, synthesizing opposites. He juxtaposes this world view with that presented by the inflexible spectators, who represent the factions in the audience. With the entire image of the cruelty or life their fragmented vision can be seen as invalid.

From the beginning of the play Osborne presents the shifting, inclusive nature of reality not only through the gestic devices but through the characterization of the actors. At the beginning of the play Osborne focuses upon both their roles as actors and also their lack of emotional commitment to the profession. They detach the audience from its stock response to the Happening form by calling attention to the "obvious over-familiar theatrical device[s]" (p. 12) that the play seems to present. But as they do this they present a picture of boredom that is undercut by the fact that they do perform well. They are detached from their roles, but not uninterested in them. This con-

¹⁸Hoy, "Comedy, Tragedy, and Tragicomedy," p. 642.

cept is further delineated at the end of the first act when the audience witnesses the stage management detached from their jobs as they dance to a blaring pop group in either a "rather demented manner" or an "off-hand" way (p. 27). Yet when the time comes they still perform their duties. They are not uninvolved: they are merely able to synthesize the opposites.

The six characters recall Pirandello's six: but the resemblance ends with the number. They are known to the audience only by relationship to another of the characters or by sex or by duty. But, they are marvelously incongruous, since their characteristics embrace many opposites. The only unilateral character is the Father who died in 1930. Therefore, he dresses in 1930's fashion and merely sits and plays the piano and sings. The world reflected through his songs is fixed and certain. The rest of the characters are incongruous as they mirror the factions of the present society. Unlike the father, they did not miss the twentieth century.

The older lady gives a speech on the pulpit advocating women's liberation, reverts to her sexist role to leave the pulpit (she asks the chap to assist her even though she needs no help) and reads pornography to the audience for much of the second act with out flinching. Osborne characterizes her reading of the material as "gentle declamation" (p. 46). She reads it as if it were merely intellectually interesting. She does understand what she is reading and she accepts it.

The chairman is well educated, "toffee-nosed" (p. 20), an "eyes upward grown-in Committee Man" (p. 16). He can criticize the program booklet, but cannot face the "certain dark, painful places" that "we

shouldn't expose--for our own sakes and those of others" (p. 38). He usually recites poetry from Shakespeare and Sidney. However, after a few ales from the box man he sings "My balls are like a red, red rose" (p. 59). His ambivalence is presented even in his farewell to the audience: "And may the Good Lord bless you and keep you. Or God rot you" (p. 60).

The chap relates the story of his life and loves and sexual conquests. When he concludes, he explains the "deep essence of those relationships. He states that he has "been walled up in" "Women's Insides" and their "despairs and agony" since he can remember (p. 37). Yet, he interacts with the girl on a fairly superficial level during most of the play. He assumes the pulpit to deliver a speech about the political situation in a "thick Belfast accent" (p. 52). This speech so engages the girl that she berates the audience. But the chap merely leaves the pulpit and explains that he was "running out of steam anyway" (p. 53). Almost immediately later he makes another speech that alternates between a sexist and a women's liberation image of women. After this speech the girl again tries to interact with the chap. She herself is a mixture of glib profanity, materialism, romance and poetry. She incongruously invites the chap to kiss her at the end of a speech that begins in retaliation of the sexist position in the chap's last speech. Her language is consistent with her committed and modern character traits: "People don't fall in love. . . . That idea is no longer effective in the context of modern techniques" (p. 58). After the kiss, the chap's statement synthesizes the antagonistic ambivalence in his character:

Oh, heart, dearest heart. What does that mean! Rhetoric. I do, I have, I've wanted you, want you, will, may not and so on. I love you, yes. I shall. Shan't. . . .Do. Don't. Will. Wont't. Can. Can't. I wish I were inside you. Now. At this moment . . . However (pp. 58-9).

The detachment of the actors is not only implicit in their ambivalence; it is also part of the ambiguity of their roles as actors. Throughout the play the audience is never certain whether the actors are indeed acting or whether they are reacting naturally. The boundaries between appearance and reality are never defined. This ambiguity is part of Osborne's concept of the theatre as an open metaphor. The reality of everyone is often the appearance--and vice versa.

The sense of detachment in A Sense of Detachment is obviously not the same as the stance of the heroes of the previous three plays, Pamela, Laurie, and Wyatt. These heroes equate detachment with elevation, isolation, and negation. Their detachment denies fragments of life that they deem negative and even demeaning in the quest for individuality. When they discover that they are part of the entire cruelty of life, they cannot forgive their immersion in the comic community. In A Sense of Detachment the characters recognize that true detachment is an acceptance of the lurching flexibilities of the society. They move to the comic rhythm, not against it. The heroes of the previous plays affect detachment with an energy that belies its essence. The characters of the Happening let actuality be; they let the world, the real comic antagonist, win since they realize that one cannot apply any rules to the lurching flexibilities of the society. They accept the tumult, the cruelty of passion and the cruelty of dispassion, the past and the

present.

At the end of the play the six characters summarize the evening as a presentation of "what you'd call your lot. Our lot." They join hands and sing a song from the past, "Widdecome Fair in its original," as they "produce bunting with the words on each piece THE--VERY--BEST--OF--BRITISH--LUCK." After the old song they hum "When You Are Weary, Friend of Mine" and leave the stage to return to "face the audience but with no sense of 'Taking A Call'" (pp. 59-60). This ending emphasizes the Chance that is the essence of comedy in the uncertain English society, the acceptance that is the necessary comic spirit in this society which is the opposite of the energy of the Osborne hero's simple effort, and the union and immersion of the actors and their incongruity with the audience. This image of the ironic comic society is the background of all Osborne's plays though heroes may loom in the foreground. Even then the heroes adjust to the comic rhythm of the society, accepting their lots.

CONCLUSION

This study applies the concept of ironic comedy (developed from the comic theories of Bergson, Meredith, Frye and Langer) to the subject matter, dramatic forms, and audience response of Osborne's stage plays from 1957 to 1973. The ostensive comic contest in all the plays is between a member of society and the values of that society. There is also a more essential confrontation between the Osborne hero's idealized self-image of elevated vitality and will and the private personal reality of failure to transcend natural human limitations. Often the idealized elevation of the hero results in distortion of the antithetical values of his society to emphasize the hero's singularity and isolation. But every hero's criticism of society has some validity because the societies in the plays are all essentially negative. Both contests end in comic impasse: the ideal self simply embraces the reality of non-transcendence and the reality of the society as inimical facts of existence.

Osborne's experiments in dramatic form include the naturalistic play, Brechtian cabaret and epic theatres, the expressionistic-dream play, the drawing-room comedy, the revue, and the theatres of the absurd and cruelty. These forms are inextricable from the comic contests and the audience reaction in the plays. The ambivalent audience response of ironic comedy coincides with Osborne's goal of a simultaneously emotionally engaged and intellectually detached audience. The forms elicit--because of their theatrical novelty and/or popularity--

a stock response from the English audience. Before the mid-60's Osborne tempers the audience's intellectual detachment with emotional involvement with the heroes. Later, the audience's emotionalism is infused with an intellectual detachment. Their stock responses reflect the plays' differing comic contexts.

The dramatic forms identify the natures of the societies the heroes combat. In Look Back in Anger and Epitaph for George Dillon the heroes' willed artistry and heroism contest the destiny and determinism of the naturalistic world. Osborne adapts Brecht's cabaret theatrics in The Entertainer and The World of Paul Slickey. The heroes affect inertia of the spirit to elevate themselves above the mediocre, sentimental, petite-bourgeoisie English morality that musicals present. With Brecht's epic theatre Osborne changes the comic contexts to societies that are neither contemporary nor English. The comic dialectic in Luther, A Patriot for Me, and A Place Calling Itself Rome is between the heroes' isolated and elevated self-images and their public, societal, and historical images. In Plays for England revue (The Blood of the Bambergs) and absurd, Genet-inspired (Under Plain Cover) techniques present royalty-worshipping and fantasy-loving, sadomasochistic England in opposition to a devil-may-care trickster and a bastion of societal mores. Inadmissible Evidence's expressionistic dream-trial sequence emphasizes the personal nature of Maitland's comic contest. In public he is the establishment lawyer and the decadent, transcendent womanizer. His immoral transcendence is a pose that hides his belief in his own guilt. The drawing-room comedies, Time Present, The Hotel in Amsterdam,

and West of Suez, present the heroes' idealized aloof indifference to the factious, hysterical, cacophonous England of the sixties. Osborne uses Artaud's concept of the theatre of cruelty and the techniques of the Happening in A Sense of Detachment to present the imperfect English society (minus an Osborne hero) that is characterized by CHANCE or CRUELTY.

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

Jan 13, 1975
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